

Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of
Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child
Relationships

Mallory Dilks, B.A.

Department of Child & Youth Studies

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Abstract

Within the context of international adoption, previous research has focused on parent-child attachment relationships and various aspects of the adoption process. However, less is known about other aspects of parent-child relationships (e.g., cohesion, conflict) within internationally adoptive families. Additionally, there is a need for research that explores *both* parent and child perceptions of the *process* of adoption – including pre- and post-adoptive factors – and its connection to the quality of parent-child relationships. This research utilized a qualitatively-oriented methodology to conduct separate, in-depth interviews with 10 adoptive Canadian mothers and their adopted Chinese children (aged 9 to 11 years). Results highlight parent and child reports of mainly strong, positive relationships. Several pre-adoption experiences are examined, including institutionalization, age at the time of adoption, and parental stress/expectations. A key finding concerns the link that adoptive parents perceive between the quality of their child's pre-adoptive care (i.e., mainly early institutionalized care) and the quality of their relationship. Interestingly, this link is perceived in two different ways – either as a challenge for the parent-child relationship or as a means to strengthen it. Post-adoption experiences are also explored, including cultural socialization, creating a transracial family, discussing adoption, parental stress, and sibling involvement. A key finding involves parent and child reports that cultural socialization efforts (i.e., familiarizing children with Chinese culture) are linked to more positive parent-child relationships. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to theory and practice within the context of international adoption.

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Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Throughout North America, international adoption is becoming an increasingly sought after way in which to expand families and fulfill dreams of parenthood (Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Groza, Ryan, & Cash, 2003; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Lee, 2003; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, & The Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006). The practice of international adoption is described as prospective parents adopting a child from a country outside of their own (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; Wilson, 2009) and reflects a growing trend of multiracial families within North American society (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; Wilson, 2009). In Canada, more specifically, over 2000 international adoptions took place in 2009, with children arriving from upwards of 20 countries worldwide (Hilborn, 2010).

The implementation of China's 'One Child Policy' in 1979 has been a contributing factor in establishing China as the most frequently sought after country for international adoptions into Canada (Cohen, Lojkasek, Zadeh, Pugliese, & Kiefer, 2008; Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Hilborn, 2010; Johnson, 2002). This policy was developed as a result of China's growing population, strained economy, and increased life expectancy, and ultimately limits families to having only one child (Cohen et al., 2008; Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Johnson, 2002). While it has been a successful means of controlling population growth, it has also resulted in a significant number of infants being abandoned after birth

and placed in less than optimal government institutions (Cohen et al., 2008; Engel, Phillips, & Dellacava, 2007). Moreover, a gender imbalance has also been established, as the preference for male children in Chinese society has led to increased female abandonment and adoption (Engel et al., 2007; Johnson, 2002).

As previously indicated, the number of international adoptions into North America continues to grow each year, and has consequently sparked an increased interest in examining the development of internationally adopted children (Groza et al., 2003; Lee, 2003; Mohanty et al., 2006; Welsh, Viana, Petrill, & Mathias, 2007). Such research interest spans across a wide range of academic disciplines including psychology, sociology, medicine, and cultural studies (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009). Most often, an underlying assumption of this research is that early adoption experiences are key to understanding children's later cognitive and socio-emotional development – the “early experience assumption” (Schaffer, 2000). On this note, in the context of international adoption, a primary focus of research has been on the early experience of institutionalized care among adoptees and its impact on later development (Cohen et al., 2008; Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009).

Such adverse circumstances often place adoptees at an increased risk of experiencing physical and psychological challenges, in addition to the added impact of loss of birth culture, histories of neglect, and possible prenatal complications (Welsh et al., 2007; van den Dries, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009). Studies in this area have focused on a range of child outcomes including attachment formation (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Palacios, Roman, Moreno, & Leon, 2009; van den Dries et al., 2009; Wilson, 2009), socio-emotional development (Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Johnston et

al., 2007; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007), physical growth (Cohen et al., 2008; Pomerleau et al., 2005), cognitive development (Tan, 2009), language acquisition (Glennen, 2007), and behavioural difficulties (Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Tan & Marfo, 2006). Although general findings are consistent with the early experience assumption, suggesting that international adoptees experience some challenges in these aforementioned areas, research has also challenged this common belief with some children demonstrating considerable resilience (Cohen et al., 2008; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007).

While these studies show an abundance of literature that addresses issues pertaining to international adoption, little is known about the family context that promotes successful outcomes in adoptive family relations (Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Palacios et al., 2009). As suggested by Cohen and Farnia (2011), such contextual factors are very important to consider in terms of promoting successful child and family outcomes for international adoptees. In addition, there is a lack of research that focuses on Canadian families who have adopted a child from China, as well as studies that consider the child's perspective when examining family interactions. Accordingly, the present study utilizes a distinctly qualitative methodology, involving in-depth interviews with both mothers and their adopted children, to uncover which aspects of the family environment are associated with optimal outcomes among adopted children and their families. The main goal of this study is to explore Canadian families who have adopted a child from China and examine links between pre- and post-adoption experiences and the quality of parent-child relations, as perceived by both mothers and their adopted children. In addition, this study considers how such experiences are related to the quality of relationships among international adoptees and their families.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

When exploring the impact of international adoption on parent-child relations there are a multitude of factors that need to be considered. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides a conceptual base from which to appropriately explore these considerations, as it encompasses the individual, the environment, and most importantly, the interactions between the two. In turn, this framework was designed to be the point of convergence among biology, psychology, and the social sciences in order to further existing knowledge on human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the ecological environment as “a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). In other words, the various contexts that every individual experiences are not viewed as independent entities, but rather as part of the entire system that influences human development.

Within this theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes four main *systems* that exist within each ecological environment. The first is the microsystem, which includes the most immediate environments in an individual’s life such as home and school. A key feature of this system is how each individual *experiences* these environments, with one’s perception possibly varying significantly from another’s. Second, the mesosystem involves the interaction of two or more microsystems. For example, in a child’s life, this may involve the interaction between the home and school environments. The exosystem is the third system in this theory and is described as any indirect external environment that has a direct impact on development. An example of an exosystem, for a child, could be a parent’s work environment. The fourth and final system is the macrosystem, which

encompasses the broader socio-cultural context within which the individual resides. Therefore, when considering childhood, the main premise behind this theoretical perspective is that development cannot be explored as an individual construct. Rather, it needs to be addressed in terms of behaviours that are expressed in a variety of environments and that interact in a multitude of ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this way, development itself is thought to continue throughout the life cycle, with continuous changes in each of the four systems always occurring and requiring adaptation from the individual and his/her surroundings.

With reference to the present study, ecological systems theory is relevant to conceptualizing families with internationally adopted children from China for several reasons. First, this framework stresses the importance of *contexts*, both on a psychological/individual level and on a macro/cultural level, and the interactions between them. In the case of Chinese adoptees and their adoptive families, there are multiple contexts to be considered in the development of family relationships, including the macro and cultural contexts of China and Canada, the micro context of the family home, and the exosystems of both the adoption agency and any other outside support services. Moreover, ecological systems theory is particularly applicable to understanding the context of international adoption because in this case more than one macrosystem must be considered. For instance, in the context of Chinese international adoption into Canada the influence of two distinct cultural contexts are emphasized, namely the Canadian and Chinese cultural landscapes. In addition, the concept of *Russian dolls*, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), is theoretically meaningful when examining the many proximal (e.g., communication difficulties) and distal (e.g., the loss of traditional cultural context)

factors that might be associated with positive family relationships among Chinese adoptees and their Canadian families. Finally, the family unit itself reflects a system, as explained by the innermost level of the ecological systems theory involving interactions between dyads, triads, tetrads, and so forth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This latter theoretical concept is especially suited to examining relations within adoptive families because many kinds of family interactions are involved, some which must be newly established (e.g., between adopted child and adoptive parents/siblings) and some which will require re-negotiation (e.g., between adoptive parents and non-adopted children).

Figure 1 provides an outline of a general framework for understanding some of the factors that are associated with parent-child relations within internationally adoptive families. This framework adopts the previously described ecological systems orientation by including macro-level (i.e., cultural considerations) and micro-level (i.e., psychological/individual aspects such as pre- and post-adoption experiences) factors. In addition, this theoretical framework, as presented in Figure 1, draws on previous research in the area of international adoption and reflects relevant factors that may be considered when exploring parent-child relations.

Included at the macro-level are cultural considerations, namely the broader societal and demographic factors to be considered for internationally adoptive families with children from China (see Figure 1). Note that both the child's birth culture and the adoptive family's culture are included separately in this model, as they represent significantly distinct cultural influences on parent-child relations in adoptive families. For example, in contrast to new immigrant families, family members in the context of international adoption are unlikely to share a common cultural background; rather they

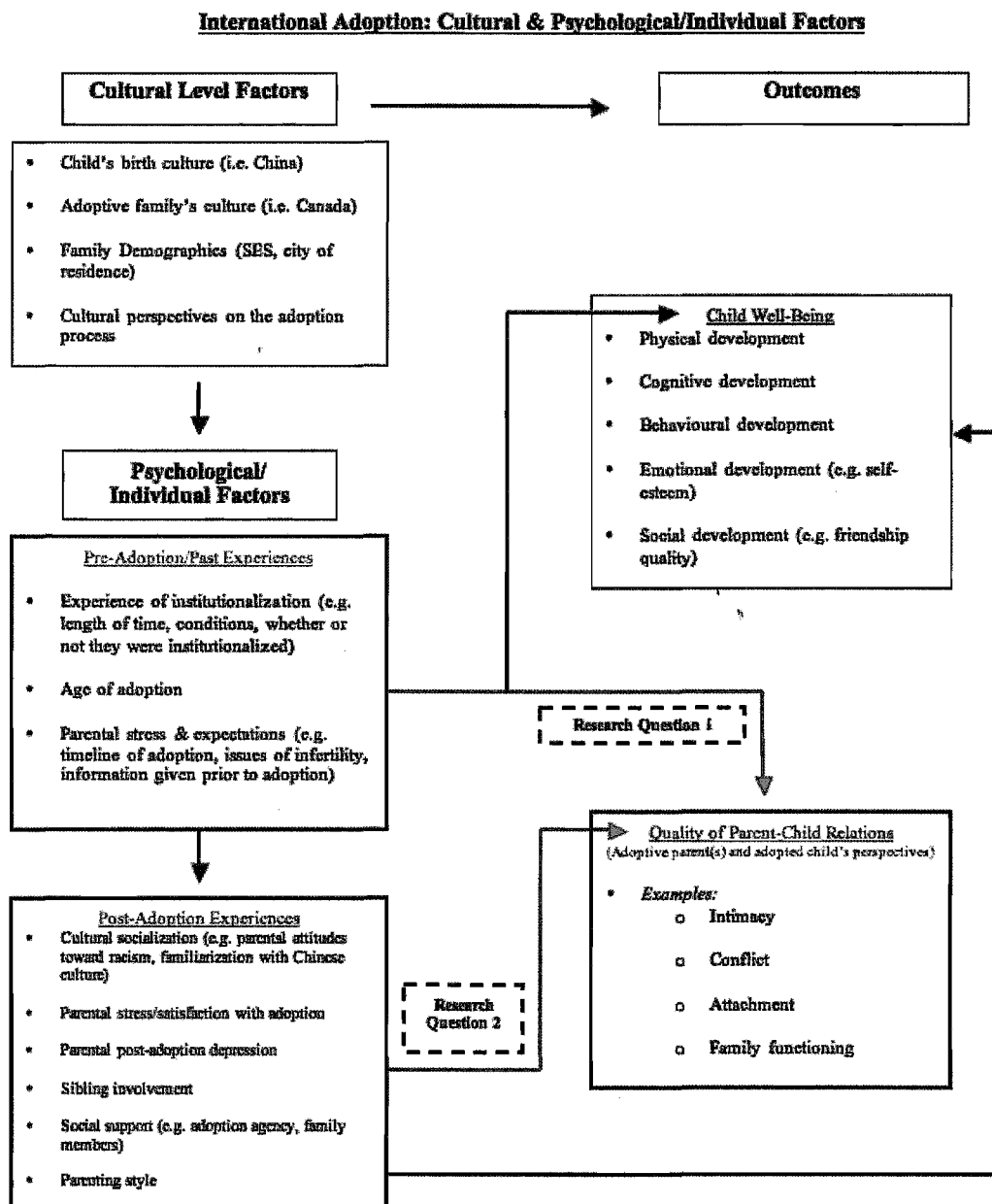


Figure 1: An ecological model presenting some of the factors associated with successful child and family outcomes in the context of Chinese adoption in Canada

Note: The red arrows indicate the associations and research questions explored in the present study

must negotiate both Chinese and Canadian cultures within their family context. In addition, Chinese culture and its presence in the family (or lack thereof) may be related to family relations, as will be discussed further in the next section. Overall, Chinese and Canadian

cultural influences are equally relevant when exploring families with internationally adopted children, as they are both continually represented by the multi-cultural, racial, and ethnic nature of the family context. Furthermore, it is also important to consider family demographics at the cultural level, including aspects such as socioeconomic status (SES) and city of residence. While most adoptive families are characterized by a relatively high SES due to the nature of international adoption requirements (Johnson, 2002), the city in which they reside can also provide or limit opportunities for cultural exposure (e.g., the city of Toronto presents families with a greater opportunities for Chinese cultural experiences). Finally, dominant cultural perspectives on international adoption are included here, as they would also influence families' perceptions of associated adoption experiences.

Next, the micro-level of the proposed framework includes psychological/individual factors, such as pre- and post-adoption experiences, which are relevant to parent-child relations (see Figure 1). In terms of pre-adoption experiences, institutionalization, age at adoption, and parental stress are identified as contributors to both child well-being and quality of parent-child relations (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2003; Mainemer, Gilman, & Ames, 2008; van Londen, Juffer, & van IJzendoorn, 2007). In this study, the association between pre-adoption experiences and the quality of parent-child relationships is explored, as there is already a wealth of research on the link between pre-adoption factors and child well-being (e.g., physical, cognitive and social development). Second, as outlined in Figure 1, post-adoption experiences include cultural socialization, parental stress/satisfaction with adoption, sibling involvement, social support, and parenting style. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it provides some examples of

post-adoption factors that may be relevant to both child well-being and parent-child relations. Again, the focus of the present study (as indicated by the red arrows) is on the interactive context of the parent-child dynamic. However, it is still important to note that research should continue to focus on all aspects of this proposed framework as the area of international adoption is still underdeveloped and requires ongoing exploration.

International Adoption and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

As previously mentioned, there is currently minimal research that explores the family context in which optimal outcomes for adoptive family relations can be achieved. Rather, the primary focus of recent literature has involved attachment as a key measure of the relations between adoptive parents and their adopted children. Developed by theorist John Bowlby (1988), attachment refers to the lasting psychological and emotional connections between individuals, namely the parent and child. Parents are often described as a secure base from which children can safely explore the world and also return to as a source of comfort, safety, and survival (Bowlby, 1988).

In the area of international adoption we see a wealth of research studies focusing specifically on the relationship between parent-child attachment and successful family- and child-based outcomes (e.g., Cohen & Farnia, 2011; Groza et al., 2003; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009). However, the findings of these studies appear to be inconsistent with regards to the impact of international adoption on the formation of attachment between the adoptive parents and adopted child. These latter results also highlight inconsistencies regarding the overall impact of early experiences on children's social development (Schaffer, 2000). Based on parental reports, Marcovitch et al. (1997) found high prevalence rates of disorganized

attachments in their sample of Romanian children adopted into Canada. These results were similar to the longitudinal findings by Chisholm (1998), noting higher rates of insecure attachment in adopted Romanian children compared to a non-adopted comparison group. However, there are also studies that highlight positive outcomes in attachment relations among internationally adopted children and their adoptive parents. Using parent reports, Cohen and Farnia (2011) found that mothers of Chinese infants indicated rapid gains in attachment security within the first six months after adoption. Similarly, van Londen et al. (2007) found rates of secure attachment similar to the normative distribution pattern in their sample of primarily Asian children.

As a result, it is clear that the results of several studies examining the quality of attachment formation among internationally adoptive families are mixed. Moreover, less is known about other equally important areas of parent-child relations such as intimacy, family cohesion, conflict resolution, communication and relatedness. Arguably, these latter constructs represent distinct aspects of parent-child relationships that can be best captured using more qualitative methods which facilitate the exploration of the link between the *process* of adoption and the *quality* of parent-child relationships. Following this line of reasoning, the main goal of this study is to examine some of the macro- and micro-ecological factors associated with successful adoption outcomes as assessed in the domain of family relationship quality, and as perceived (experienced) by both adoptive parents and their adopted children – a key feature of the family's microsystem.

The unfolding of parent-child relations undoubtedly varies significantly among all families, regardless of whether international adoption has taken place. This is a result of a variety of considerations including differences in child temperament and personality

characteristics, both of which ultimately interact with parent behaviour and influence relationship quality and the child's overall development (Hellerstedt, Madsen, Gunnar, Grotevant, Lee, & Johnson, 2008). However, recent research has also identified some important factors that are uniquely relevant to international adoptees, their adoptive parents, and the formation of parent-child relationships. These include pre-adoption experiences (e.g., institutionalization, age at time of adoption, and parental stress/expectations associated with the adoption process) and post-adoption experiences (e.g., cultural socialization, parental stress/satisfaction with adoption).

The Impact of Pre-Adoption Experiences on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

As outlined in Figure 1, several pre-adoption experiences are important to consider when trying to understand the impact of international adoption on the quality of family dynamics. Based on previous research findings, this study focuses on the following three main experiences: the occurrence of early institutionalization among adoptees, age at the time of adoption, and parental stress and expectations.

Early institutionalization. When a child is adopted from an international country such as China they arrive not only with the influence of a different cultural background but also with the lingering impact of potentially detrimental pre-adoption care (Groze & Ileana, 1996; Hellerstedt et al., 2008; Hushion, Sherman, & Siskid, 2006; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009). As a result, recent research has focused significantly on the impact of institutionalization and early deprivation on subsequent attachment relationships (Johnson, 2002; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Marcovitch et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007; Welsh et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009). These

institutions are most often government-run settings such as orphanages, and typically involve poor nutrition, lack of health care, minimal close contact with caregivers, and the presence of harmful pollutants (as cited in Lancaster & Nelson, 2009). As stated by Lancaster and Nelson (2009), “physical scars are often superficial when compared with psychological wounds inflicted by institutional life” (p. 302). Therefore, it is evident that studying children who were placed in such care and are now with adoptive parents is of great significance, both in terms of providing early intervention and increasing awareness for prospective adoptive families. It is important to note that exploring the perceived outcomes of institutional care is not relevant to adopted children from all international countries. However, China is an example of one country where orphanage care is almost always the case for infants prior to the time of adoption (Johnson, 2002).

In general, recent studies have demonstrated that the experience of institutional care prior to adoption is related to an increased risk of attachment difficulties for children from a variety of birth countries (e.g., Romania, China) (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Marcovitch et al., 1997; O’Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007; Smyke, Zeanah, Fox, Nelson, & Hurthrie, 2010; Welsh et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009; Zeanah, Amyke, Koga, Carlson, & the Bucharest Early Intervention Project Core Group, 2005). These difficulties can be attributed primarily to the fact that these institutions most often deprive adoptees of any close, intimate, or consistent contact with a primary caregiver, leaving them unprepared for building relations with their newly adoptive family (O’Connor et al., 2003; Smyke et al., 2010; van den Dries et al., 2009). Moreover, research with institutionalized adoptees also suggests that the length of time spent in deprivation is related to attachment formation, with further difficulties noted in later-adopted children in comparison to earlier-adopted

children (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2003). In addition, the impact of institutionalization is strengthened further by research that assesses non-institutionalized adoptees, with results demonstrating that these latter adoptees have attachment patterns similar to that of non-adopted children (Juffer & Rosenboom, 1997). Therefore, these latter findings support the early experience assumption (Schaffer, 2000) and reflect the deleterious impact of early institutionalization on the formation of attachment between adopted children and their families.

A unique impact of institutionalization that has been noted in recent research concerns the differences in attachment-like behaviours that are exhibited by adoptees with past experiences of adversity. One of the first studies in this area involved 46 Romanian children adopted into Canada, assessed longitudinally over a three-year period (Chisholm, 1998). The adoptees in this sample were found to behave similarly toward both their adoptive parents and strangers, which are actions characteristic of *indiscriminately friendly* behaviours (as cited in Chisholm, 1998). This means that these institutionally reared children demonstrated a tendency to approach strangers openly, lacked evidence of hesitation or nervousness toward new people, and did not use their adoptive parent(s) as a secure base (Chisholm, 1998).

Since this first study, several researchers have focused on these distinctive behaviours noted in institutionalized adoptees, with more recent work describing these actions as *disinhibited behaviours* (O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007). Based on a sample of 111 Romanian children adopted into the UK and a comparison group of non-institutionalized children, O'Connor et al. (2003) found higher rates of atypical insecure attachment behaviours in the adopted group. Moreover, these abnormal behaviours

increased in frequency for those adoptees that were institutionalized for a period of longer than six months. The institutionalized adoptees in this study were found to act in a relatively similar manner to those in Chisholm's (1998) study, behaving with equal openness toward and desire to contact both the parent and strangers. Moreover, while these behaviours were seemingly being carried out in order to interact with the parent or stranger in a positive manner, they were deemed as superficial or without the intention of receiving mutual reciprocation (O'Connor et al., 2003).

More recently, Rutter et al. (2007) studied disinhibited attachment behaviours in a follow-up to O'Connor et al.'s (2003) study, assessing the same sample of Romanian adoptees at age six and age 11. In this study, behaviours (e.g., lack of differential response between parent and stranger) at age six were noted to be similar to those found in previous studies conducted by Chisholm (1998) and O'Connor et al. (2003). In addition, these behaviours were found to persist through to the second assessment when children were 11 years of age. The findings from this latter study once again support the early experience assumption (Schaffer, 2000) and highlight the seemingly continued impact of institutional deprivation, as this research examined children several years after adoption had taken place.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the differential quality of attachment behaviours for adoptees that have experienced deprivation prior to adoption. The institutionalized adoptees behaved in ways that did not fit well into standard attachment categories, which suggests that they might need to be assessed using a different measure of parent-child relationships. For example, Marcovitch et al. (1997) found an unusual distribution of attachment patterns within their sample of 56 Romanian adoptees, deviating

from the expected allocation of secure and insecure attachment classifications. In addition, they also found no relation between the experience of institutionalized care and attachment outcomes (Marcovitch et al., 1997). To explain their results, however, Marcovitch et al. (1997) suggested that the reason they did not find a relationship between institutional care and attachment behaviours is because the attachment classification system they used was likely not appropriate for an internationally adopted population. Therefore, as is the case with the present study, exploring parent-child relations for internationally adopted children outside the context of typical attachment research becomes important to fully explore and understand the nature of adopted children's behaviours and experiences (O'Connor et al., 2003). In this regard, it is important to consider adapting traditional attachment measures and conducting research that examines different aspects of parent-child relationships (e.g., parent-child intimacy, cohesion, conflict resolution, and communication).

In summary, recent research seems to suggest that attachment difficulties are likely for adoptees who experience institutionalized care, but also that there is a unique manner in which these difficulties occur (i.e., greater evidence of disinhibited behaviours). In addition, it is also important to note that within these same studies, resilience was also noted in some of the parent-child dyads. For example, in the studies conducted by Marcovitch et al. (1997) and O'Connor et al. (2003) several parent-child dyads were characterized by secure attachment relationships; although the proportion of secure-type attachment classifications varied between the studies. Moreover, O'Connor et al. (2003) point to the problem of not knowing why some children who experienced the same institutionalized care were able to form secure attachments and others were not. Taken together, these latter findings highlight the need for qualitative, process-oriented research

that can help to elucidate how international adoption and early institutionalized care are associated with the quality of parent-child relationships (e.g., intimacy, closeness, communication, conflict; Groze & Ileana, 1996). This approach would be in line with recent theory (Schaffer, 2000) suggesting that in order to fully understand the impact of early experiences on later child development, researchers must adopt methodological approaches that begin to explore children's life paths (longitudinally) and any associated contextual variables.

An additional consideration regarding studies that address the impact of early institutionalization is that the vast majority are based on children adopted from Romania (Chisholm, 1998; Marcovitch et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007; Smyke et al., 2010; Zeanah et al., 2005). Therefore, these studies are exploring a population of children who presumably encountered the same extent of institutionalized care, and as a result may be anticipated to demonstrate similar post-adoption behaviours. Interestingly, relatively few studies have explored the impact of early institutionalization on parent-child relationships among Chinese children adopted into Canadian families (e.g. Cohen et al., 2008; Cohen & Farnia, 2011). This is despite the fact that adoption statistics continue to demonstrate that China is the country with the highest number of international adoptions into Canada each year (Hilborn, 2010); thus underscoring the importance of exploring the adoption process and relationship dynamics among these Canadian families. To address this empirical gap, the present study adopts a distinctly qualitative methodology to explore how the adoption process and early institutional experiences might be related to the formation and quality of family relationships among Chinese adoptees and their adoptive Canadian families.

Age at time of adoption. In addition to institutionalization, another pre-adoption experience that is relevant to parent-child relations is the age at which the child was adopted. In general, it has been reported that children who are adopted at later ages are increasingly likely to develop behaviour problems (Marcovitch et al., 1997). However, exploring age at time of adoption as a contributing factor to parent-child relations becomes challenging in the case of international adoptees, as it is sometimes difficult to parse out the separate impact of this factor relative to other contributing influences.

As previously mentioned, for example, longer placements within institutionalized care have been linked to an increased likelihood of insecure or disinhibited attachment behaviours among children (O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007). Therefore, the experience of institutionalization can become a complicating factor when attempting to conceptualize age of adoption as an influence on attachment strength (Schaffer, 2000). In the case of the study conducted by Marcovitch et al. (1997), a correlation of .86 was reported between age of placement in the adoptive home and time in institutionalized care. Therefore, it was very difficult to distinguish the independent effect of each of these two factors (Marcovitch et al., 1997). This, of course, is due to the fact that for most international adoptees, the age at which they are adopted is also strongly associated with the duration of time spent in institutionalization. This strong link might help to explain the continued focus on age at time of adoption in research studies of international adoption, despite the lack of evidence for a sensitive age period for successful adoption (O'Connor et al., 2003). While the age at which the child is adopted is a particularly important consideration, it remains difficult to draw any firm conclusions about its overall impact because it is heavily confounded with other factors.

Nevertheless, recent studies still attempt to discern age of adoption as a contributor to parent-child relations and attachment relationships. A research study conducted by van Londen et al. (2007), which included 70 children who were adopted internationally into the Netherlands, found that adoptees placed in their adoptive home before their first birthday were more likely to form secure attachments, and that later adoptions increased the likelihood of children developing disorganized attachment behaviours. It is noteworthy that the methodological design of this research study was unique because it could identify the separate impact of age at time of adoption and early institutionalization on the quality of parent-child relationships post-adoption. This is because the participants in this study were drawn from a variety of birth countries, some of which included the practice of early institutionalization prior to adoption and some of which did not (van Londen et al., 2007). Similarly, Smyke et al. (2010) found that the younger a child was placed in foster care following the experience of institutionalization, the more likely he/she was to develop a secure attachment to the foster parent. While this study focused on foster care as opposed to international adoption, the implications of the findings are significant. In this study, children placed into foster care before 24 months of age were more likely to form secure attachments by 42 months, which suggests that within the first 3 years of life there remains a certain plasticity to recovering from adversity and developing positive relations with caregivers (Smyke et al., 2010). Although the likelihood of this recovery decreases as the child gets older (Smyke et al., 2010), the results of this research are optimistic for the formation of positive parent-child relationships even if adversity has been experienced.

A final consideration about age at time of adoption concerns beliefs and expectations among prospective adoptive parents. More specifically, as outlined by Groze

and Ileana (1996), adoptive parents can sometimes be misled into believing that if their child was internationally adopted in infancy there is a greater chance that any early adversity will quickly be reversed. Indeed, research has demonstrated significant catch-up in areas such as physical development (e.g., Pomerleau et al., 2005), language development (e.g., Glennen, 2007), and cognitive growth (e.g., Tan & Marfo, 2006); however, the development and quality of parent-child relations may nevertheless be negatively impacted if other factors (such as early institutionalization) are experienced. Moreover, despite the possibility that an earlier age of adoption might serve as a protective factor for the formation of positive parent-child relations, there are other important pre- and post-adoption considerations that can influence the development of positive parent-child relationships, regardless of the child's age at the time of adoption (Groze & Ileana, 1996).

Parental stress and expectations. While institutionalization and age at time of adoption are both factors that have been shown to contribute to the quality of parent-child relationships, they are also both aspects that are related to the adopted child. However, it is also important to consider contributors related to the adoptive parents and family environment. In terms of pre-adoption experiences, a key consideration is overall levels of parental stress. This is particularly relevant to families participating in international adoption, as they are often described as undertaking a “difficult journey in which they encounter a host of obstacles and an unclear destination” (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009, p. 308). Often, these difficulties are related to dealing with infertility, the lack of predictability in the adoption process, preparing to create a multiracial family, and often knowing very little information about their future child before he or she arrives (Wilson, 2009). These pre-adoption experiences can undoubtedly influence the level of stress

experienced or expectations held by the adoptive parents both prior to and following the time of adoption (Viana & Welsh, 2010).

In addition, unique to families with internationally adopted children is the added influence of institutionalization on parental stress and expectations (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Mainemer et al., 1998). As highlighted earlier, the impact of institutionalization on child outcomes can be significant and, in turn, can also require a great deal of patience on the part of the adoptive parents (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009). It has been found that children who experience pre-adoption deprivation and do not have opportunities to form positive relationships are often at an increased risk for encountering difficulties in terms of attachment behaviours (Mainemer et al., 1998; Wilson, 2009). This is thought to occur because adopted children may have acquired a learned belief that adults are not a source of love or support, and therefore they may not be able to respond appropriately to adoptive parents' attempts to form a meaningful and close relationship (Mainemer et al., 1998). Research by Juffer and Rosenboom (1997) clearly highlights this outcome of institutionalized care, as the sample utilized for this study consisted of mothers of *non-institutionalized* children. When comparing maternal sensitivity and responsiveness between biological mothers and adoptive mothers whose children did not experience deprivation, differences were not noted between these two groups (Juffer & Rosenboom, 1997). Therefore, this emphasizes the significant impact of pre-adoption adversity on the adoptive parents, in addition to further highlighting the amount of hard work, patience, and understanding that is required for adoptive families (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Moreover, it is apparent that these experiences can become a great source of frustration, stress, and isolation for adoptive parents, as the impact of institutionalization is

difficult for other families to understand and provide assistance with (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009). In turn, parents of institutionalized children have been found to have the highest levels of reported stress when compared to parents of non-institutionalized or non-adopted children (Mainemer et al., 1998).

Finally, it is also important to note that the research mentioned above is exploring the association between *child* experiences and *parental* outcomes. However, one finding from a recent study by Viana and Welsh (2010) indicated that the adopted child's age, gender, or special needs status were not related to levels of parental stress six months following adoption, whereas maternal pre-adoption symptoms of depression were related to higher levels of stress at the follow-up assessment. Therefore, this suggests that while the adopted child's characteristics and background have been demonstrated to have a clear influence on parenting outcomes, there are some parental factors that may contribute to stress independent of the child's characteristics/ experiences (Viana & Welsh, 2010). As a result, when exploring parent-child relations within internationally adoptive families, it is important to obtain information on both the child's experiences and already existing parental risk factors to obtain a complete understanding of the family context. The present study accomplishes this by considering pre-adoption experiences that are relevant to *both* the adopted child (e.g., institutionalization) and the adoptive parent(s) (e.g., parental stress and expectations).

The Impact of Post-Adoption Experiences on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

In addition to pre-adoption experiences, it is also crucial to consider post-adoption aspects of the family environment that may be contributing to the overall quality of parent-

child relationships. As outlined in Figure 1, several post-adoption experiences are important to consider when trying to understand the impact of international adoption on the quality of family dynamics. However, based on current research findings this study focuses on the constructs of cultural socialization and parental stress/satisfaction with the adoption process, as these have been shown to be influential on parent-child relationships (e.g., Mainemer et al., 1998; Mohanty et al., 2006; Yoon, 2004). Moreover, these constructs are both relevant to an ecological systems framework because they emphasize the importance of the family system as an interactive context, in addition to incorporating aspects of the cultural and individual/psychological environments (in the case of cultural socialization).

Cultural socialization. The process of international adoption can be described as a paradox, namely because ethnic/racial minority children are adopted into families that are typically members of the majority culture (Lee, 2003). Therefore, while adoptees may be minorities in society because of their ethnic and racial orientation, they are typically treated as members of the majority culture (i.e. Caucasian) as a result of their adoption (Lee, 2003). This contradictory experience raises unique questions that are relevant to parent-child relations because these visible differences cannot simply be ignored (Lee et al., 2006). In addition, parents of internationally adopted children are left with the decision of how and to what extent they wish to address issues of race and ethnicity, as well as the degree to which the child's birth culture will be involved in their family experiences (Lee et al., 2006).

The concept of cultural socialization is a term frequently utilized within current literature to describe the manner in which adoptive parents integrate issues of race and culture within the family environment (Johnston et al., 2007; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006).

This specifically refers to aspects of their *adopted child's* birth culture as opposed to the culture of the adoptive family (Lee et al., 2006). In addition, research in this area also focuses on the extent to which the adopted child internalizes and understands the information presented by their parents and how this contributes to them becoming knowledgeable members of society (Lee, 2003). In general, it has been suggested that many internationally adoptive parents place importance on cultural socialization and make a strong effort to familiarize their adopted children with features of his or her birth culture (Johnston et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006; Thomas & Tessler, 2007). Some frequently mentioned examples of this process include eating cultural foods, playing with toys from the child's birth culture, and interacting with other children who were born in the same country (Johnston et al., 2007; Mohanty et al., 2006). In addition, it has also been found that parents who are more aware of the effects of racism and who feel stronger connectedness to their child's birth culture are more likely to participate in cultural socialization (Johnston et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfield, 2001). These issues are particularly relevant when considering international adoption from China, as adoptees' physical differences are visible and make them susceptible to scrutiny from others (Scroggs & Heitfield, 2001).

Several recent studies have addressed the association between cultural socialization and the well-being of the adopted child. For example, high levels of cultural socialization have been shown to be related to fewer externalizing behaviours (Johnston et al., 2007), positive self-esteem (Mohanty et al., 2006; Yoon, 2004), and a more secure ethnic identity (Yoon, 2004). However, less is currently known about the association between cultural socialization and parent-child relations. Based on a sample of 241 adolescent Korean

adoptees and their adoptive families, Yoon (2004) reported a correlation between high levels of cultural socialization and positive parent-child relations. This association was measured through quantitatively designed questionnaires, including constructs such as parental warmth, communication, parental support of cultural socialization, and child self-esteem. However, the specific factors thought to be related to *how* this positive association developed could not be clearly identified in this study, thus warranting further research on the nature of this association (Yoon, 2004). In addition, Mohanty et al. (2006) found that adult adoptees retrospectively reported feeling less attached to their adoptive families if cultural socialization was absent. Also, they perceived their parents as being warmer and more affectionate if cultural socialization was present.

However, these quantitatively-oriented studies involved data from two significantly different age groups, and were limited in their capacity to elucidate how and why cultural socialization was linked to adolescents'/adults' retrospective perceptions of parent-child relationship quality (Mohanty et al., 2006; Yoon, 2004). In contrast, the qualitative and process-oriented methodology utilized in this study allows for a closer examination of the perceived link between cultural socialization and the quality of family relationships among Chinese adoptees, as described by both the adoptive parent and adopted child.

Parental stress and satisfaction with adoption. As previously discussed, parents who participate in international adoption are often at an increased risk for experiencing high levels of stress prior to the adoption taking place (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Wilson, 2009). If stress is persistent it may raise concerns in terms of successful adoption outcomes, as “a successful adoption depends less on the child and more on parental and family characteristics, which allow the child to be incorporated into the family without an

intolerable level of family distress or chronic crisis” (Groze & Ileana, 1996, p. 561).

Therefore, it is of great importance to consider characteristics of the adoptive parents and the family demographics when trying to understand factors that promote positive parent-child relationships in the context of international adoption.

When further examining the impact of parental and family characteristics on the quality of parent-child relationships, parental stress in particular has been shown to be related to attachment formation (Mainemer et al., 1998). More specifically, research by Mainemer et al. (1998) found that child behavioural problems and lower acceptability or satisfaction with the adopted child were related to higher levels of parental stress. One possible reason suggested for this was that parents may not have been prepared for the inherent risks associated with behavioural development in internationally adopted children (i.e., emotional reactivity, attention difficulties), and therefore held unrealistic expectations about their child (Mainemer et al., 1998). In addition, parental stress was also found to be negatively associated with attachment strength (Mainemer et al., 1998). Therefore, this emphasizes the importance of developing secure attachment relations as one way to potentially alleviate a source of stress for the adoptive parents and create more positive family interactions as a result.

The Present Study

In summary, previous research in the area of international adoption provides a wealth of important information on some of the factors associated with international adoption, early institutionalization experiences and parent-child attachment relationships. However, these studies also highlight some important conceptual and methodological issues that need to be addressed in future studies in this area.

First, a significant amount of research has been rooted in attachment theory. Therefore, attachment as an outcome measure has been thoroughly evaluated in the context of early experiences and international adoption. However, less is currently known about other aspects of parent-child relations within internationally adoptive families such as intimacy, cohesion, conflict resolution, and communication. As suggested by Schaffer (2000), re-evaluating outcome measures and assessing other aspects of parent-child relationships (such as those mentioned above) may be pivotal in understanding the link between the experience of early institutionalized care and later perceptions of family relationship quality.

In addition, there is also a strong need for research that explores how the *process* of adoption – including pre- and post-adoptive factors – is linked to the quality of parent-child relationships within international adoptive families (Schaffer, 2000). In this regard, another gap that emerges concerns the methodology used in most studies of adoption. Specifically, to date the majority of studies have been quantitative in nature relying solely on questionnaires, scales, and standardized scoring. As a result, less is known about the adoption *process* and the *quality* of parent-child relationships as they unfold both in day-to-day interactions and over longer periods of time. In this way, the impact of early institutional care and the adoption process on parent-child relationship quality can be assessed more comprehensively, and in a manner that eliminates any simple, cause-and-effect conceptualizations of developmental processes (Schaffer, 2000).

In addition, a careful review of the literature uncovered a near absence of research that incorporated the adopted child's point of view (with the exception of one study, which used quantitative assessments; Yoon, 2004). From an ecological systems viewpoint,

children's perspectives are very important to include as they are based on the interactive nature of human behaviour and environmental contexts. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine an exploration of the quality of parent-child relationships without incorporating children's perspectives. In addition, providing two distinct viewpoints (i.e., the parent and the child) also aims to limit any influence of social desirability or a positivity bias (unconscious or conscious), as adoptive parents may portray the adoption process and their role as adoptive parents in a successful and positive light.

Finally, very few studies have focused on Chinese children adopted into Canadian families (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008; Cohen & Farnia, 2011), which is surprising given that China is the country with the leading number of international adoptions into Canada (Hilborn, 2010). As a result, this is a particular constellation of Canadian families that should be explored further.

Building on previous research studies, the present study utilizes a qualitatively-oriented methodology to conduct in-depth interviews with Canadian adoptive parents and their adopted Chinese children. The main goal of these interviews is to uncover and explore each family's perceptions of how various pre- and post-adoption contextual experiences might be associated with the quality of parent-child relationships. The following are some of the day-to-day aspects of parent-child relationships that are examined within these families: connectedness, intimacy, communication, and conflict/resolution. More specifically, the present study explores the following research questions: (1) How are *pre-adoption experiences* (e.g., early institutionalization, age at time of adoption, and parental stress and expectations) associated with the quality of parent-child relationships, as perceived by parents and their children? And (2) How are

post-adoption experiences (e.g., cultural socialization and parental stress/satisfaction with adoption) associated with the quality of parent-child relationships, as perceived by parents and their children? Finally, the present study also explores if other key pre- and post-adoption experiences emerge as associated with the quality of parent-child relationships – in addition to those factors suggested in the first two research questions.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included 10 adoptive mothers and their internationally adopted Chinese daughters. Families were recruited with the assistance of an international adoption agency located in Toronto, Ontario. After obtaining ethics clearance from Brock University's research ethics board (File #10-057; see Appendix A) information regarding the present study was distributed to adoptive families through emails and letters sent by the executive director of the agency. The information provided consisted of a poster (see Appendix B) and a letter (see Appendix C), which included the researcher's contact information and the requirements for participation. In addition, personal networks of families who participated were also utilized in order to assist with recruitment.

To ensure linguistic and cultural uniformity (which is especially relevant when exploring cultural socialization), all adoptive families included in this study were Caucasian and English speaking. In addition, as the criteria for becoming adoptive parents are very explicitly set out by the governments involved with international adoption, in this study an attempt was not made to control for factors such as socioeconomic status or city of residence. However, all families were located within southern Ontario. Each family was provided with the opportunity to decide whether the mother or father participated in the

parent interview, allowing for the most meaningful parental account within each family system to be obtained. Of the 10 families that participated, every family chose to have the mother participate in the interview process. All of the mothers were employed, with the exception of one mother who had already retired. Three of the families consisted of single mothers (two never married, one widowed), and three families also had older biological children. Interestingly, five families had adopted two daughters from China, however only one child was interviewed in these cases, as per the age criteria outlined for this study.

With reference to the children, all were adopted between the ages of eight and 19 months (mean = 13.5 months) and were between nine and 11 years of age at the time of the interviews. This particular age range was appropriate in meeting this study's research goals because it ensured that children were able to engage meaningfully in the interview process, while not yet experiencing many of the difficulties associated with the transition to the teenage years and high school (Steinberg, 2008). As reported by their mothers, all adoptees experienced institutionalized care prior to adoption. However, an exception is noted here, as one mother also indicated that her daughter was believed to have been in a foster home for a period of time (in addition to brief orphanage care).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected between November 2010 and January 2011. Semi-structured interviews were utilized and were designed to provide a thorough exploration of the quality of parent-child relations within each family. This form of interviewing was chosen for use in this study because it allows for a topic to be explored openly and provides participants with the freedom to express their ideas and feelings (Esterberg, 2002). As described by Esterberg (2002), the interview process allows researchers to "try to move beyond our own

experiences and ideas and to *really* understand the other person's point of view" (p. 87). In addition, this particular type of interview also permits flexibility with each participant, as their individual responses shape the structure and flow of the dialogue (Esterberg, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Therefore, while the interviewer provides some structure in terms of asking questions and targeting a particular topic of conversation, each interview can unfold in a unique and interactive manner based on the dialogue created between each participant and the interviewer (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Furthermore, relevant to the present study, semi-structured interviews are also very useful when trying to explore a topic in great detail or furthering a body knowledge in a specific area (Esterberg, 2002). As a result, these interviews were an appropriate choice for this research as it adds to literature on international adoption and addresses several of the gaps previously outlined in existing studies.

The questions asked to parents and children were designed by the researcher with the intent of addressing the main goals of the study, as well as the constructs relevant to the research questions. Separate interview guides were created for the parent and the child (see Appendices D and E), each targeting similar topic areas in an age-appropriate manner. The mothers' interviews began by gathering basic demographic information for the family, including aspects such as the parents' age, occupation, and city of residence. Next, the mothers' interviews involved two lines of questioning. The first line of questioning involved gathering a detailed account of each family's experience with adoption, including factors that led to choosing adoption, the process leading up to the time of receiving their child, parental concerns or stressors, any known information about the child's pre-adoptive experiences, and the experience of adoption itself (including the trip to China to receive

their child). Participants' adoption stories were used in this way as a methodological tool for acquiring information to provide a contextual background of each family's experiences, as it was demonstrated through previously mentioned research that these factors could play a role in the formation of parent-child relationships. Furthermore, the sharing of the adoption story also helped to build a sense of understanding and appreciation for what each family has gone through because each adoption story can vary extensively from another (e.g. Lancaster & Nelson, 2009).

The second line of questioning focused on mothers' perceptions of how the experiences described throughout their adoption stories have impacted the quality of the relations between them and their adopted child. As outlined in the interview guide, mothers were first asked to generally describe the nature of their relationship with their child (e.g., "What are the features of your relationship with your child that you enjoy the most?"). In addition, these questions also aimed to address some of the specific constructs related to the quality of parent-child relations, such as communication (e.g., "How would you describe your child's openness or willingness to communicate with you?"), and conflict resolution (e.g., "If you and your child have a disagreement, what would it typically be about? How would this typically be resolved?"). Next, interview questions guided the discussion toward some of the previously mentioned factors demonstrated to influence the quality of the parent-child relationship. For example, as outlined further in the interview guide, questions were framed around constructs such as institutionalization (e.g., "How do you think your child's pre-adoption history may or may not have had an impact on the development of your relationship with your child?"), age at the time of adoption (e.g., "How do you feel the age of your child when adopted may have an influence on the

development of your relationship with your child?”), and cultural socialization (e.g., “Describe the importance of familiarizing your child with Chinese culture.”). However, it is also important to note that these interviews were open-ended, and therefore did not restrict the discussion to only the experiences that were discussed throughout the literature review. This reflects a goal of this study, which was to explore any other factors brought to the researcher’s attention by the mothers, and the interview process was designed to ensure that this opportunity was available.

The objectives of the children’s interviews were similar to those guiding the interviews with their mothers. Similarly, their interviews began with a general discussion regarding their understanding of their adoption histories, followed by more specific questions to address the main research questions explored in this study. However, when recounting their adoption stories, it was anticipated that the children would only recall details based on what they had been told by their parents. Nonetheless, this dialogue between the child and the researcher was included as a way to build rapport and allow the children to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with an unfamiliar person.

From there, the questions asked of children were similar to those included in the parental interviews, beginning with a discussion about how the children perceived their relationships with their mothers (e.g., “Can you describe any ways your relationship with your mom has changed over time?”). In addition, interview questions also addressed constructs related to the quality of parent-child relations such as communication (e.g., “How do you feel about talking to your mom about things that happen in your family, at school, with friends, etc.?), and intimacy (e.g., “Can you describe some examples of activities you and your mom do together? How do these things make you feel about your

relationship with your mom?”). From there, the previously mentioned pre- and post-adoption experiences relative to the quality of parent-child relationships were also addressed. Similar constructs to those included in the mothers’ interviews were discussed including cultural socialization (e.g., “Do your parents help to teach you about China and Chinese activities?” and “How does this make you feel about your birth culture?”), and other factors such as parental stress (e.g., “Can you describe aspects of your life that you feel have an influence on your relationship with your mom?”). The children’s interview guide was more open-ended in nature when compared with the mothers’ interview guide. This was because some constructs (i.e., institutionalization, age at time of adoption) could not be explored as thoroughly with the children because they had minimal insight as to how these factors impacted the quality of their relationships with their mothers. However, by asking more general questions, probes were included to touch on some of the constructs relevant to their experiences (e.g., cultural socialization). In addition, the interviews with the children were also open to any additional experiences or contextual factors that they wished to bring forth.

Procedure

The interviews took place in the homes of the participants. Mothers’ informed consent and children’s assent (see Appendices F and G) were obtained from each participant prior to the start of the interview, and each individual agreed to have their interview audio recorded. Following this, each interview was conducted in a private setting so that the parent and child’s responses remained undisclosed to each other. A research assistant was also present during each family’s interview to assist with set up and collect any necessary notes. In addition, following each interview the researcher and assistant

participated in an informal debriefing session to determine if they generally agreed on the nature and content of the parent and child interviews.

In keeping with the systemic framework adopted in this study, each family was provided with the opportunity to choose whether the mother or father participated in the parent interview. This increased the likelihood of ensuring that the most meaningful parental account within each family system was obtained. As previously described, separate parent and child interviews occurred, with the mothers' taking place first and the children after. This allowed for the mothers' full versions of the adoption stories to be obtained prior to hearing their children's retrospective accounts, as they were very young when the adoption took place. However, it is important to note that one child did not wish to do the interview alone and therefore her mother was present in the room. As a result, this interview process was not consistent with that used for the other children and was interpreted cautiously. Overall, the interviews with the mothers lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and the interviews with the children lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. After the completion of each interview, participants were thanked for their time and provided with both a letter of appreciation (see Appendices H and I) and a \$30 remuneration. Each family was also informed that a feedback letter would be available upon completion of the study if they were interested in receiving information about the findings.

Analysis

As each interview was completed, the researcher immediately transcribed the data. From there, multiple readings of the transcripts occurred to ensure a high level of familiarity with the material. Once transcription and close readings were completed, the first step in analysis was to engage intensively with the interview transcripts, make

thorough notes throughout each one, and identify any preliminary concepts, categories, or ideas that emerged (Charmaz, 2005). These initial observations were not pre-established or derived from previous literature, rather they were revealed throughout the process and served as a means for establishing themes for the data as a whole (e.g. characteristics of parent-child relationships, impact of early institutionalization). In addition, this process also allowed for patterns, commonalities, and/or differences between the transcripts to be examined, based on the themes that were identified.

Once preliminary themes were determined, the next step in analysis was to re-read each transcript and consider how these key ideas contributed to an understanding of the research questions explored in this study. As little is known in this area of research, connections between pre- and post-adoption experiences and parent-child relationships were derived exclusively from the specific data collected in this study, favouring an inductive approach to analysis (Charmaz, 2005). This was accomplished, first, by closely examining a compiled list of adoption experiences indicated by both parents and children, and determining which research question they were most appropriately suited to (e.g. experience of institutionalization included as a pre-adoption experience; cultural socialization included as a post-adoption experience). From there, the nature of the parent-child relationship was explored relative to these experiences based on the re-occurring themes that were previously identified. Furthermore, as some research information has been gathered in this area (as outlined previously), the final component in the analytic process involved considering any links between pre- and post-adoption experiences and the quality of parent-child relationships relative to outcomes in previous studies on international adoption. Overall, the primary goal of this analysis was to allow for abstract

or novel ideas to emerge, although where applicable, the key ideas established throughout the analytic procedure were still grounded in the current literature.

Ethical Considerations

The present study raised some important ethical concerns because it involved research with a child population. As such, special considerations were taken to ensure that all ethical safeguards were in place when conducting the research. To begin, information regarding the present study was presented to a large group of internationally adoptive families by the executive director of the adoption agency that agreed to assist in recruitment. However, the director was not in a position of authority over any of the families, which eliminated the risk of any possible or perceived coercion for families to participate. From there, information letters and posters were provided to families prior to the interview process, the consent/assent forms were completed immediately before the interviews took place, and a letter of appreciation was given to both the parent and child following the duration of the interviews. As is the case when carrying out research with children, it is important to note that each information letter and consent form indicated the researcher's ethical responsibility to report any suspected child abuse/neglect to the appropriate authorities. Furthermore, each family was offered the opportunity to provide their email address at the time of the interview if they wished to receive a feedback letter once the study was completed. In addition, participants were assured that the audio recordings and written transcripts of their interviews would be confidentially labelled and kept in a secure location. As is the case when carrying out the interview process, anonymity cannot be maintained as the researcher is aware of each participant's identity and parents/children are likely referring to family names throughout the interviews

(Esterberg, 2002). However, confidentiality was ensured as only the researcher, one research assistant, and the faculty supervisor had access to the data and identity of the participants. Pseudonyms were also used when analyzing the transcripts, and most importantly, when reporting the final results for this study.

More specific to the nature of this study, there were additional ethical considerations due to the subject matter discussed in the interviews. One primary concern involved bringing forth issues of parent-child relations, as there was a risk of generating emotional or psychological upset in either the mothers or the children when discussing this topic. This was particularly relevant if there were difficulties within the parent-child relationship. Moreover, these concerns were especially important when focusing on internationally adoptive families, as the literature review provided evidence of specific risk factors related to the formation of parent-child relations in this case. In turn, it was essential for the researcher and research assistant to be aware of these concerns, and also to make each participant aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. It is noteworthy that no participant withdrew her/his participation in this study.

Results

The presentation of this study's findings will be outlined in relation to each of the research questions explored in this study, with mothers' perceptions considered first, followed by children's perceptions. However, due to the nature of this study and the age of the children interviewed, the mothers' perceptions are highlighted more frequently than the children's. Although the children's perceptions are conceptualized as equally important to those of the mothers', some questions simply could not be explored with the children. For example, it was inappropriate to explore children's perceptions about how their age at the

time of adoption was related to the quality of the relationships with their adoptive mothers. Nonetheless, there were still instances where the children made connections between specific experiences and the quality of relationships they shared with their mothers, and these will be noted when applicable. In addition, there were also instances when the children's perceptions regarding the link between their adoptions, past and current family experiences, and the quality of their relationships with their mothers were more implicit (or indirectly expressed). Although it cannot be stated that these findings represent the children's conscious perceptions in any meaningful way, these findings are still important to highlight as they pertain to the quality of mother-child relationships.

Before outlining the findings specific to each of the research questions outlined in this study, it is first important to comment more generally on the perceived quality of the mother-daughter relationships within this sample of internationally adoptive families. Overall, these relationships were reported as strong and secure by all participants, including both mothers and children. The perceptions of the positive quality of these relations were evident throughout the interviews, with one mother indicating it was "the most amazing relationship in [her] life" (Karen), and another suggesting, "I don't think you could find a mother-daughter that are tighter than her and I are" (Lauren). Furthermore, when asked to select a word that most accurately described each participant's perception of their mother-daughter relationship, mothers included words such as "solid" (Stephanie), "in sync" (Nancy), "connected" (Leslie), and "respectful" (Kim), while children chose "close" (Brooke), "amazing" (Emily), "happy" (Alison), and "strong" (Emma and Ashley).

In addition, mothers and daughters all indicated open communication within their relationships, or at least a comfort and trust in being able to talk to each other and share

details of their lives. However, as the girls are becoming older and desiring more autonomy from their mothers, several participants also indicated that the amount of information shared between them was naturally changing. For example, as indicated by a child participant, “sometimes it’s just like between me and my friends and stuff” (Leah). Finally, while conflict within these dyads was acknowledged by both mothers and daughters, it was often over minimal or seemingly insignificant issues such as clothing, establishing rules, and homework. Moreover, several mothers had a difficult time even being able to articulate an issue that caused any significant disagreements in their relationship, with Lauren mentioning that, “there’s nothing major, certainly, that we have issues about.” Furthermore, if these difficulties did arise they were addressed relatively quickly and often through what mothers and daughters described as a “compromise.” Mothers reported that the specific ways they resolved conflicts with their daughters depended on the issue at hand, but they emphasized their ability to resolve problematic issues relatively quickly through negotiation and communication. Taken together, the findings from this study highlight generally secure and positive relationships, as reported by both mothers and their children.

In addition, it is also important to acknowledge the overwhelmingly positive perception that almost all of these mothers had regarding the adoption process itself. Outside of the context of their mother-daughter relationship, the entire experience of adoption was viewed as favourable, as highlighted in this mother’s quote: “The support, the interactions, the people that we’ve met, the opportunities, have been unbelievable!” (Lauren). Consistent with this, Kim also commented:

I would only say that the adoption for me, and for my husband because he'd tell you the same, was the most wonderful experience of our life. It's changed everything for us...I think it's the best thing in the world to do!

These quotes highlight the unique impact that international adoption had on these families, indicating an encouraging starting point for the formation of parent-child relations. In fact, it is possible that because the adoption process was perceived in such a positive light within these families the stage was already set for the development of positive parent-child interactions and relationships.

When turning more towards the specific links that were perceived between the process of international adoption (including both pre- and post-adoption family experiences) and parent-child relationships, there were several key findings that emerged. These will be highlighted and explored in reference to each of the research questions explored in this study.

How are Pre-Adoption Experiences Associated With the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships?

Early institutionalization. The most profound impact of pre-adoption experiences on the quality of mother-daughter relationships was the occurrence of institutionalized care. As previously indicated, all but one of the mothers stated that their daughter was placed in an orphanage prior to the time of adoption, which was not surprising given the prevalence of institutionalization in China (Cohen et al., 2008). However, one mother did indicate that her daughter was placed in a foster home outside of the institution, although she knew very few details regarding the quality of this placement. Nonetheless, she mentioned that her daughter also would have been in the orphanage for a brief period of

time prior to the adoption. Furthermore, the conditions of the orphanages were also described fairly consistently by most of the mothers. Terms such as ‘large,’ ‘overcrowded,’ ‘lack of stimulation,’ ‘malnourishment,’ and ‘under funded’ were commonly used to depict these conditions, which often resulted in children who were described as developmentally delayed and/or physically ill. Nonetheless, there was still a sense of optimism regarding the orphanages, as reported by these mothers, because they believed “they had so many kids they couldn’t begin to give them the proper care” (Lauren). This point was furthered by Karen who indicates, “My sense of the people who I met there...they cared about the children, they did the best they could.” In two interviews some exceptions were noted, with orphanage conditions being portrayed by these mothers in more favourable terms. This was mainly attributed to perceptions of more one-on-one contact with nannies or volunteers, resulting in more stimulation and play for the children. However, these discrepancies in care were not significantly different from the less than optimal environments described by the remaining mothers and were likely a result of adoptions taking place from a variety of provinces and different institutions throughout China.

The influence of pre-adoption care on mother-daughter relations was noted in two distinct ways based on mothers’ perceptions; either as a challenge for the parent-child relationship or as a means to strengthen it. When considering the idea of a ‘challenge’ to the mother-daughter relationship, the most prevalent concern was maternal reports of child abandonment and/or dependency issues. More than half of the mothers perceived a direct link between their daughter’s experience with institutionalized care, their resulting fear of abandonment or dependency on them, and the influence this has had on their relationship. Although these concerns manifested slightly differently within each family, it was apparent

that the lack of a primary caregiver early on was perceived as an important contributor to the children's persistent fear of being left alone or losing the mother they have grown to rely on. This is reflected in the following excerpt from Leslie's interview:

Interviewer: Have you ever felt like that aspect of her pre-adoption care has played any role in your relationship?

Leslie: Its getting better all the time but the main thing that she had big issues with was abandonment issues. So she, like she would panic big time if I wasn't where she thought I should be, so for I would say 8 years, and that's a long time...she would come out of her room and it would be 'mommy where are you?' and like just terror, and I'd say 'I'm downstairs' or 'I'm still in my room' whatever right, and she would be so mad because I wasn't maybe standing outside of her door, and it didn't matter whether I was down here or whether I was in my bed still, it was just terror.

Interviewer: And was this just with you, or with your husband as well?

Leslie: No, just with me. And she would just scream...there was no consoling her, it was just this adamant thing that I was gone and I wasn't there.

Here it is apparent that Leslie's daughter expresses significant concern that her mother may suddenly not be there for her, even when everything is fine and there is nothing particular to worry about. While Leslie did comment that these concerns were slowly becoming less noticeable, this was still a frequently mentioned issue throughout her interview. In turn, it was also very apparent that it was a source of stress for both Leslie and her daughter.

In another interview, Carol similarly described Emily's fear of being left alone and added that Emily is very insecure when Carol shows attention or love towards anything

else. For example, when referring to the family dog, Carol comments, “you know she absolutely detests it when I talk about the dog outside of the house to somebody else...you know everything should be...about her...”[Emily says] ‘you talk about the dog but you don’t talk about me’...‘you love her more than me’.” In turn, Emily’s fear of having to ‘share’ Carol’s love is perceived by Carol as having a direct link to her pre-adoption care within an institution:

I think maybe part of the reason why she’s so clingy is because once she found something of her own she wasn’t, she’s not letting me go right. She doesn’t want any [thing else] to come between us so she doesn’t really see that there is any room for others...to be part of the mix right, so its her and her alone that I should sort of dwell on...and I think that’s from her pre-adoption years...you know one nanny had to look after 12 kids who never got much individual attention, so that’s why she’s so keen on...being the focus of my attention all the time.

Therefore, not only was her daughter expressing a dependency on Carol, but she also demonstrated a hesitance toward her showing any interest in anyone other than herself. In addition, Carol perceived this as being linked closely to Emily’s pre-adoption care and the relatively impoverished social interactions she received during that time. Furthermore, Carol also described the influence this has on her relationship with Emily in the following quote: “it does get a little claustrophobic after awhile.”

In nearly half of the mothers’ interviews issues of abandonment and dependency were also shown more indirectly, primarily through disturbances in the children’s sleep. For example, Stephanie indicated that Alexis thrashed in her sleep during their time in China, while Nancy mentioned that Samantha “...just didn’t sleep, she was so worried and

so afraid and she couldn't be without me." In addition, it was also frequently reported that the children often ended up sleeping with their parents (some as recent as the time of the interviews) as a result of these difficulties. Moreover, mothers often perceived sleep disturbances as a direct result of their children's experiences of institutionalized care and the fear they expressed within the mother-daughter relationship. As commented by Lauren:

She didn't sleep until she was almost two and a half, she'd be up three, four, five times during the night and so mom was getting pretty tense cause mom needs her sleep...In hindsight I think it was a test because in the orphanage back then there were so many kids, there was so little attention, they could cry as long as they wanted to, nobody would pick them up, nobody would cuddle them, and I think that was her way of double checking that somebody would come if she cried. It was testing us to make sure that that devotion was there.

Interestingly, disturbances in sleeping behaviours were also noted by Karen, the one mother who indicated her daughter was placed within a foster home prior to adoption. She stated that her daughter sleeps with her, as "she was used to people being around" within her foster home and had significant difficulties falling asleep on her own. However, regardless of the fact that she was in a foster home, the link to her daughter's perceived fear of abandonment was still present and reflected in a statement from Karen's interview:

Every so often I say to her, 'do you think you might want to sleep in your own bedroom as opposed to it just being a dressing room for you?' or something, and she'd say 'well when I'm 12', or 'when I'm six' or whatever, and then she said 'sometimes I just wake up at night and I just reach over to make sure that you're there.' I think, I really do, that somewhere in her core, I don't think she remembers

being abandoned, I don't think she remembers being left to be found, but I think she knows that she was and that fact that she still has that need years later to reach out is...that's just what her need is.

Therefore, it is apparent that issues pertaining to abandonment and dependency were evident in these families' adoption stories, regardless of the degree of exposure to institutionalized care the girls had encountered.

Outside of the predominant theme of abandonment/dependency, another challenge for mother-daughter relationships resulting from institutionalized care was the lingering impact of developmental delays and/or illness. These child outcomes were present in nearly every family in some way and included delayed walking, delayed speech, and lasting effects of malnourishment. The link between these concerns and the mother-daughter relationship was noted by Nancy when discussing her daughter's sensory deficits and the challenge it has posed within their relationship:

She has a sensory overlay and that's just because she wasn't stimulated enough, she didn't get enough sensory stimulation when she was little, so even a light touch feels quite hard to her...So you know we've dealt with all that but I think it impacts your ability to really hug them and hold them.

Although other mothers did not frequently note this perceived impact, it is an important link to consider when discussing the impact of institutionalization. Although abandonment/dependency concerns reflected a strong emotional outcome of orphanage care, this quote by Nancy suggested a more tangible outcome of this care and the resulting influence it had on being able to provide physical nurturance to her daughter when needed. However, as an aside, it is also important to note that several mothers indicated quick rates

of catch-up in these developmental delays not long after placement within their adoptive families. This was indicated by Stephanie who stated that, “she closed that gap fast”, and furthered by Nancy, “...she was at the 10th percentile...after she came home from China [she] was in the 98th percentile in a year.”

On the other hand, while these previous findings reflected the challenges that institutionalized care presented for the quality of mother-daughter relationships, more than half of the mothers also believed that institutionalized care had become a means to strengthen the relationships with their daughters. This was mainly reflected in a tremendous desire to compensate for the deficits their children had experienced in the early months of their lives. As stated by Leslie, “it was just this oh my god you need us, like we need to take care of you, we need to feed you, I need to dress you...you know, give you everything you need.” Kim furthers this by indicating her reaction to Lily’s experience of institutionalization:

[It made] me love her more and [made] me more thankful that she came to our house...that we would have the resources to help her and get her back where she should be and that she was placed in the right home...she’s your child and you just do whatever you can to help.

Therefore, it becomes apparent that these mothers expressed feelings of needing to do whatever they possibly could in order to provide positive experiences for their children, as they were aware of the deprivation they had previously encountered.

In addition, not only did the child’s experiences of institutionalized care strengthen the quality of mother-daughter relationships in terms of the mothers’ feelings toward their children’s past, but it also had a way of strengthening the bond through parenting

behaviours. For example, although Nancy commented that her daughter became rather needy and dependent once they arrived home from China, she more so reflected on the positive impact this had on the development of the relationship:

...all of a sudden her whole world changed and I was really the only person providing care to her at that point so she became quite needy then for a little while...It was nice though because it allowed me to really bond with her because when they're so independent you wonder what they need you for, and then all of a sudden she needed me for everything so we got quite close during that time. But ya she got back on her feet fairly quickly.

It was apparent that Nancy had to adjust her parenting behaviours in order to meet her daughter's needs, but clearly emphasized the way this helped to strengthen their relationship and helped her daughter to gain some independence as well. Consistent with Nancy's perspective, Kim also commented that her knowledge of her daughter's pre-adoption care resulted in her modifying her approach to parenting when her daughter is upset, helping to strengthen the trust and comfort within their relationship:

I think these kids when they're 15 months have gone through more traumatic experiences in that 15 months than most adults go through in their entire life...that does change my relationship with her, you know maybe it does make me a little more sensitive to when she's crying or when she needs me and I'm a little less harsh and a little more sympathetic. Not in a 'poor you' way but you know...you shouldn't say 'pull up your socks' and get in bed because that might not be the best thing for her.

Again, it is evident that what is best for her child given her past experiences is clearly

taken into consideration over and above the reason she is actually upset. This then results in Kim modifying how she handles these situations as a mother. Lastly, Karen also described how her relationship with her daughter became stronger when she adapted her own parenting principles to her daughter's need to sleep with her. While she initially believed 'good' parenting meant ensuring your child slept in her own room, she reflected on how their relationship became stronger once she shifted more toward what her daughter needed rather than what she thought was best:

I think it was that I was then meeting what her need was, so I was doing what she needed me to do, not what I thought I needed to do. That was probably, that was such a good lesson because over the years what I've learned is that its important for me to pay attention to what she needs as much as myself and then figure it out.

Taken together, it is apparent that while the outcomes of institutionalized care presented some difficulties for these adoptees, several mothers took it as an opportunity to acknowledge what their children had experienced and simultaneously attempt to create the best possible situation for them once they arrived home. This *perceived opportunity* is what enabled mothers to not only adjust their attitudes towards their children, but also to modify their approach to parenting in a variety of contexts, thus further strengthening the mother-daughter relationships.

Age at time of adoption. All of the mothers either perceived their daughter's age at the time of adoption as not having any significant influence on the quality of their relationship, or they were only able to offer ways in which it might have benefited the quality of their relationship. As commented by Stephanie, "I'm sure earlier would have been better and later would have been worse. It is what it is, right?" Of course all of the

mothers expressed that they would have liked to adopt them as younger infants, but it was also simply a fact of their adoption and they were grateful to have gotten them as young as they did (more than half the girls were 12 months or younger, with the eldest being 19 months). Therefore, mothers were only able to comment on how it might have been different if their daughters were adopted at an older or younger age. Consistent with this, Marilyn indicated, "I would imagine, I mean certainly if I'd adopted a 2 year old or a 3 year old then definitely that would have taken longer to get the relationship off the ground." Joanne reinforced this by mentioning, "I think that I was in there fairly early, that I could see this development and make that bond and I think I'd be struggling harder and fighting harder if she was that much older." In addition to this, another consideration mentioned by a few of the mothers regarding the age of adoption was the difficulties associated with missing out on the gap of time between the children's abandonment (in the case of China specifically) and adoption. Of course, this is an inevitable aspect of Chinese adoption and was reinforced by Karen:

...the only thing I can't do for her is I don't have some of her babyhood stories for her...I can tell her how she was, like what her first words were here, I can tell her her story from the moment I got her, but I don't have that early story...I don't think it makes a difference for [our] attachment, I just feel badly that she misses those pieces of her story.

Therefore, although adoptive mothers can articulate the challenges of missing those early months, it was not perceived as necessarily impacting their relationship negatively; rather, it was perceived as simply being a part of their journey together.

Parental stress and expectations. As is to be expected within any family, mothers did indicate stressors that were experienced prior to, during, and very shortly after the adoption process. These included factors such as the stress of the adoption process itself, anxiety surrounding the outcome of the adoption (i.e. potential developmental issues in the children), and illness and sleep deprivation after arriving home. However, only two of the mothers perceived any links between these stressors and the quality of the relationship with their daughter. First, when Kim was discussing the stress of the adoption process, she commented:

The only thing that I would say is that it's a very stressful process, and maybe by the time you get to China and you get your child there's such (*sound of relief*) that you're just so relieved that it's a good thing. You think 'oh this is finally what I've been working for'...so maybe that's added to the, not to add to love cause that sounds crazy, but it just maybe added to the easiness of when she was...adopted into our family...If anything it just made us so much happier to get her cause it made the work all worth while.

Therefore, while Kim does recognize the adoption process as a stressor for her, she perceives it to have had a positive influence on the initial formation of her relationship with her daughter, as it made her that much more grateful and appreciative to have finally welcomed her into their family. In contrast, Marilyn also commented on a source of stress for her prior to and during the time of the adoption, which indicated more of a challenge for her relationship with her daughter:

It was a little stressful for us because I had become ill about a month before we travelled...[once we got home] that was kind of a crazy time for us cause I was

dealing with this unknown illness...and so I ended up being hospitalized for a week, that was very hard because...I had a 14 month old baby...I remember at the time feeling saddened that I had to deal with other stuff, like you know major stuff going on in your life and I wasn't able to focus you know completely on [her]. For sure there was probably times when I could have been able to spend more time with her...So I'm sure it did, in the first year, play a huge part of how our relationship developed.

This segment of Marilyn's interview reflects the physical and emotional stress she experienced during the time of her daughter's adoption. In turn, she perceived this stress as posing a significant challenge not only for her personally, but also with regard to the formation of a positive mother-daughter relationship. However, she also commented that her health concern was resolved within the first year of her daughter's adoption, and therefore only was an issue during these initial months.

Interestingly, one mother also reported that a *lack* of stress was perceived to be a contributing factor to the initial formation of a positive mother-daughter relationship. Having already had two biological children, she was not overly concerned about the adoption process and felt comfortable with the challenges a baby could present:

Having had two kids already maybe the stresses were less than some families...I think maybe because we weren't very stressed out with the adoption part of it and getting her, that came through because...people right away assumed she was our daughter. So, maybe that helped her feel more comfortable and bond faster.

(Lauren)

Here, the adoption process or anticipation of receiving her daughter was not a significant

source of stress for this mother, which she then perceived as having a positive impact on the formation of their relationship early on.

A final consideration to note was the degree to which these mothers were prepared for the adoption process. The largest contributor to this preparedness concerned the adoption agencies these families used, as mothers often indicated they attended several seminars and meetings prior to the time of the adoption. As Kim mentioned, “the adoption agency was fantastic with walking us through everything.” Moreover, specific to the challenges that international adoption can pose, Stephanie added, “I think they do an excellent job of actually preparing you and what to do and how to interpret that.” As a result of this preparation, these mothers were aware of the potential difficulties that could arise, but as Stephanie commented, these low expectations were actually a positive contributor to the formation of her relationship with her daughter:

My expectation was very low because we had been forewarned of so many problems that could come up...so I was kind of bracing myself for a lot of problems and basically it was simple. You know the adjustment was easy which probably helped her adjust and I...was pretty relaxed about most stuff.

Therefore, it seems as though the mothers were well prepared in advance for any difficulties that could arise through the process of Chinese adoption. However, it was these expectations that actually made the transition easier for Stephanie, particularly in the way her and her daughter interacted and adjusted to one another.

Summary of findings – How are pre-adoption experiences associated with the quality of parent-child relationships? Overall, when considering the influence of pre-adoption experiences on the quality of the mother-daughter relationships, it is apparent that

these families experienced several challenges related to the adoption process and personal stressors. The most prevalent concern was the impact of early institutionalization and the abandonment/dependency issues that were perceived to be related to this experience. However, while some mothers identified this as a challenge to the quality of the mother-daughter relationship, it was also an aspect that strengthened these relations as well. Furthermore, the age at the time the girls were adopted was not perceived by mothers as being related to the quality of the mother-daughter relationships. In this regard, mothers were only able to speculate some of the ways that age at the time of adoption might be related in theory to the quality mother-daughter relationships, and acknowledged how grateful they were to receive their daughters as young as they did. Finally, it was also evident that several mothers were able to identify stressors that occurred prior to or around the time of the adoption, as well as expectations associated with the adoption process. However, the outcome of these considerations on the quality of relationships they shared with their adopted daughters was perceived in both positive and challenging ways.

Taken together, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of resiliency noted within these mother-daughter relationships as they were able to identify the challenges associated with pre-adoption experiences, while simultaneously acknowledging that these were difficulties they were able to overcome or that did not pose a significant risk to the quality of these relationships.

How are Post-Adoption Experiences Associated With the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships?

Cultural socialization. Familiarizing the girls with aspects of Chinese culture was significantly embraced and celebrated within these families, and was suggested to have

started when the children were fairly young. Cultural socialization was expressed in a variety of ways, with involvement in celebrating Chinese traditions (i.e. Chinese New Year and Autumn Moon Festival) being the most predominant and mentioned by all but one of the mothers. Other activities in which the girls participated, either currently or in the past, included Mandarin or language classes (five families) and Chinese singing/dance classes (two families), in addition to more family-based activities such as cooking Chinese foods, traveling back to China (six families), having Chinese décor and items in the home, and participation in Chinese adoption groups (seven families). Becoming involved with such activities was a cherished and joyful aspect of these family environments, as Stephanie indicated, "I enjoy being a part of the adoption community because you go to these events...so its part of our social life, these people are part of our lives right...we're all weaved together." Furthermore, stressing the importance of this for their family as a whole, Karen mentioned:

We've realized it's about allowing her to create an identity for herself, which is this pride in her Chinese heritage, understanding her story as being really unique, that she's part of a family, and that by her being here it's helped to carve our family story in a different way. So it's not about her just having to fit with our family but our family has changed because she's been a part of it, just like we've changed.

Moreover, the children also expressed satisfaction in participating in Chinese cultural activities. Emma mentions, "It just makes me take pride in who I am and where I was made", while Lily adds it makes her feel, "excited that I get to still talk about where I came from and Chinese stuff." Finally, Brooke also comments, "I'm really lucky to have both [Canadian] and Chinese...cultures so that I can enjoy both and learn about both."

Interestingly, although cultural socialization was an integral part of most of these family environments for a number of years, some of the children initially indicated that they did not really take part in many activities associated with China. However, when further prompted in the interview, they were then able to articulate several Chinese activities or traditions that they had or currently do participate in. Therefore, this finding might highlight the 'normalcy' of Chinese activities within these families, reflecting the idea that it is integrated to the point that it does not stand out for these children. On the other hand, this finding might also reflect the fact that these children participated in some of these activities when they were younger (as mentioned by some mothers) and, in turn, some prompting was needed to recall things they had done in the past. Nonetheless, all of the children had participated in some aspect of cultural socialization throughout their lives and, as reflected in the quotes above, this involvement was perceived by them to be a positive and happy experience.

In addition to the enjoyment felt by participants when partaking in these activities, there was also a strong link between cultural socialization and the quality of mother-daughter relationships as reported by both mothers and children. With reference to the mothers' perceptions of this link, almost all felt that cultural socialization strengthened the quality of their relationships with their daughters. However, the specific reasons they attributed to this tended to vary. First, some mothers felt as though it was beneficial for them and their daughters to have a shared understanding of Chinese culture, while also emphasizing that they were proud to acknowledge where their daughters were born. This, in turn, was perceived to reinforce their bond, as Leslie mentioned:

Well it shows that we're proud of her. It shows that we like the Chinese culture...you know, you're important and your background is important and we can't tell you what time you were born but you're still great sort of thing.

It becomes apparent here that cultural socialization can be utilized to not only form a common ground within the relationship in terms of Chinese culture, but that it can also help to fill some of the gaps that exist within adoptive families (i.e. lack of specific birth information). As a result, Leslie perceives this to be a way to strengthen her relationship with her daughter. Nancy also discusses the importance of cultural socialization for her relationship with her daughter in a similar way:

...just my willingness to do it shows how willing I am to learn about another heritage and be part of what is her birth right, and so I think that's good for our relationship because I think that she then believes me when I talk about things related to her adoption history and how little I know about what her birth situation might have been...I think its good that she sees that I'm involved and that I care about it as much as she does.

Along with this perception, other mothers suggested that participating in cultural socialization was another way that international adoption adds to the quality of their relationship. This is reflected in Stephanie's interview, as she suggests, "I think [cultural socialization] just adds, its dimensional right, it makes [our relationship] more interesting."

Similarly, Joanne comments:

Although we do less and less of [Chinese activities] now...it's a good thing for me to do with the girls because [Emma's Chinese] godmother has taught us how to make dumplings and she's told the girls 'this is what my mom and I did together',

so...that's what we do together...Its just one more thing that we can do and we can talk about being Chinese and growing up in a Chinese family and what it might be like while we're doing that.

Therefore, Joanne and Stephanie both use cultural socialization as an opportunity to spend time with their daughters, while also discussing Chinese culture and building on the openness and communication within their relationship. Therefore, these added activities provide extra opportunities for mothers and daughters to interact with one another and are perceived by these mothers as strengthening their relationship as a whole.

In addition to the mothers' perceptions, this was an area where some of the children were also able to articulate their perceptions about how cultural socialization might have influenced their relationships with their mothers. Interestingly, the perceptions of those children who did comment on this issue were consistent with those reported by the group of mothers. Similar to the idea of creating a shared understanding of the children's birth culture and reinforcing the mother-daughter bond, Alexis comments, "I think that its like a good relation and she tries really hard to keep on going with [my] culture and how [I'm] doing with it and that type of thing." It is apparent she is acknowledging her mother's efforts to engage with her birth culture and that this is something she appreciates. In addition, and similar to the reports provided by the group of mothers, Lily reported that cultural socialization added to the opportunities for her to spend time with her mom, which was positive for their relationship:

Interviewer: ...when you're doing these [Chinese activities]...how does that make you feel about your relationship with your mom?

Lily: Good.

Interviewer: What do you mean by good?

Lily: Um, excited that I get to spend more time with my mom.

Overall, the children's accounts were more succinct and provided fewer details. However, their accounts still manage to convey their belief that cultural socialization plays a positive role with regard to the quality of relationships they share with their mothers.

Creating a transracial family. The process of international adoption inherently results in the formation of a transracial family, which is something that was openly acknowledged and discussed by all of the mothers. Moreover, half of the mothers also perceived that the racial differences between them and their daughters added a unique and positive quality to their relationship. As commented by Joanne:

I think its been better because it gives us so much more to talk about right, and so we can analyze the world that way but then we can also use that as a springboard cause then we can talk about her Muslim friend and her Hindu friend and so I use it as a...[way] to talk about lots of things.

The idea of increased communication and openness in the relationship is clearly reflected here, and is also emphasized by several other mothers. Marilyn indicates, "I mean [racial differences] gives us, it certainly gives us something to talk about...and gives us a reason to be close and help her talk about these things." Similarly, Karen states, "I'm going to guess [racial differences have] probably made [our relationship] richer in some ways because the conversations are rich, the conversations are interesting about how we look different." Furthermore, Karen also refers to the way her and her daughter work together within their relationship to address these differences as she grows older:

...she's 11 so she's starting to move into puberty and stuff right, so we do a lot of

talking about what her body looks like...as we see different Chinese women we're going to start to really pay attention to their figures...so we can predict what she's going to look like a bit more...so its not just talking as a mom to your daughter about puberty...but it's like together we need to learn a little bit about this kind of stuff...how do you put your eye makeup on if you're Chinese so that it looks really nice and so how do we learn about that together?...so I'm guessing this probably strengthens [our relationship] in all these practical kinds of ways.

Therefore, it is apparent that being part of a transracial family is perceived by mothers as providing further opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions with their daughters, which strengthens their relationship as a result. Also, it is clear that a possibility exists for these racial differences to begin to manifest themselves in more tangible ways as the girls approach adolescence and begin to question more about their physical appearance.

In contrast to these findings, a third of the mothers also indicated that they do not believe their daughters are concerned or aware of these racial differences as of yet, even though they are frequently discussed within the family environment. Lauren mentions, "I talk to her about it fairly regularly...like you know 'does it ever bother you that mom and dad don't look like you?', and she's like 'what do you mean?' She doesn't see it, she doesn't see it right." This provides a distinct comparison to Karen's comment above, but still reinforces the notion of open communication and increased chances to share in these discussions with their children.

Discussing adoption. An important and unexpected finding involved how discussions of the adoption process were linked to the quality of parent-child relationships. To some extent this latter issue is related to the construct of cultural socialization (i.e.

participating in activities associated with Chinese culture inevitably draws attention towards adoption); however, this analysis centered more on parents' discussions of specific aspects of each child's unique story. Overall, the girls' adoption stories were openly and frequently discussed within each mother-daughter relationship beginning at a very young age. Aspects such as the orphanage, birth parents, how their parents adopted them, and why they were placed for adoption were all part of conversations between these mothers and their children. In addition, these discussions were also perceived in a positive way by all participants. Emma, an adoptee, stated that when talking about her adoption, "it makes me feel interested and intrigued because if I wasn't adopted I would not know what it meant, so it sounds interesting that I'm adopted and I think it's cool because I'm unique and I'm different than other people." Similarly, Nancy, a mother, commented that she feels it is important to talk about her daughter's adoption because "I know there is a strong connection there, so we do talk about it and her feelings around that."

In terms of the specific impact that discussions of adoption have on the quality of parent-child relationships, two distinct themes emerged. Interestingly, these findings were derived primarily from the children's perspectives, as the frequent discussions of adoption within their family environments allowed for them to provide insightful feedback regarding their relationships with their adoptive mothers. One way that some adoptees expressed feelings toward their adoptive mothers after discussing aspects of their adoption story involved a sense of appreciation for what their adoptive mothers had done for them. For instance, Alison indicated, "I just feel really happy that she adopted me cause if she didn't I still could have been in the orphanage." Similarly, Samantha commented, "I'm thankful that she got me", and Emma stated, "I don't care that she's not my birth mom

because she took me from China and sort of saved me.” These quotes demonstrate not only the children’s knowledge and understanding of their adoption stories, but also indicate that they are able to translate that knowledge into a feeling of admiration toward their adoptive mothers. Although they were not asked to directly state how their relationships with their mothers were influenced through discussions of their adoption stories, they made these positive connections indirectly.

In addition, the second theme that was implicitly found within the children’s interviews was a link between an awareness of their adoption stories and feelings of uncertainty toward both their birth and adoptive mothers. It was apparent that the children were still negotiating their feelings toward their adoption process, their birth mothers, and their adoptive mothers. This was reflected in a portion of Samantha’s interview:

Interviewer: Do you think that you feel comfortable to talk to [your mom] about stuff?

Samantha: Yep!

Interviewer: And how does it make you feel about your relationship with [your mom] when you get to talk to her about lots of things?

Samantha: When we talk about when I got adopted sometimes I feel sad because when I was younger I thought it was because [my birth parents] didn’t want me...and [my mom] would always say that I was a baby so I couldn’t have done anything [wrong]....and sometimes I cry.

Even though Samantha was not directly asked to discuss her feelings about her adoption story, she initiated this conversation and made a link between her particular adoption story, the quality of communication with her mom, and her feelings of discomfort toward her

birth parents. Similarly, Leah remarks, “Sometimes it’s hard because you can’t like, you can’t sometimes talk about how you feel about not seeing your birth parents and stuff,” but also mentions that she does talk about these feelings with her mom now. Therefore, there is some confusion expressed here, as it is unclear why she feels she cannot talk about it, but yet simultaneously indicates that she does talk to her mom about these feelings toward her birth family. Consistent with Samantha’s comments, Leah’s remark suggests the presence of open communication with one’s adoptive mother (i.e. a positive relationship quality), despite uneasy feelings toward one’s birth parents.

Interestingly, the children’s frequent mention of their birth parents also reflects some of the themes previously outlined. For example, the predominance of abandonment/dependency issues was mirrored in discussions between Brooke and her mother:

Interviewer: So how does it make you feel when you talk to your mom about your adoption?

Brooke: Um sometimes I feel a little scared that she’ll get angry or sad because she...she might think that I want to go back and like leave here and go back to China and find my birth mom...but she was happy to tell me everything that she knew.

Based on this latter quote, it is evident that Brooke was both clearly discussing her adoption with her mother and expressing a similar idea of uncertainty surrounding her adoption story and feelings toward her birth parents. However, she was also exhibiting a sense of worry that these conversations may influence her mother’s thoughts, and possibly projecting her own fear of abandonment onto her mother. In addition, another previously

identified finding involved the link between cultural socialization and the quality of parent-child relationships, as reflected in a portion of Leah's interview:

Leah: Its fun to do all the Chinese stuff with my mom like cooking and having everybody over and getting all the Chinese stuff out...

Interviewer: How does that make you feel about your relationship with your mom...while you're doing these things?

Leah: Its fun and I wonder what it would be like if I had my other family with me and stuff during that.

While Leah does indicate that participating in Chinese activities is fun to do with her mom, she still seems to question what would happen if she could do these things with her birth family as well. Therefore, it seems that she might still be trying to find her birth family's place with regard to her Chinese identity.

When considering the unexpected findings related to discussions between the children and their adoptive mothers, it is important to note that it was not ethical to ask the children to explicitly discuss their feelings with regards to their birth versus adoptive mothers during the interviews. Therefore, these findings do not necessarily reflect insecurities in their relationships with their adoptive mothers. However, these children appear to be experiencing and to have many questions about this issue, and this would be an interesting area for future investigation.

Parental stress and satisfaction. In addition to the previously mentioned stressors that mothers indicated prior to, during, and very shortly after the adoption process took place, mothers also reported experiencing stressors within the post-adoption family environment (as to be expected within any family). Four mothers clearly perceived an

association between these stressors and the quality of their relationships with their daughters. While the nature of these stressors varied, the mothers reported them as posing both benefits and challenges for the mother-daughter relationship.

Both Mary and Stephanie indicated that they experienced some stressful situations post-adoption but that they perceived these as strengthening the relationship they shared with their daughters. Mary described concerns within the dynamics of her family, mainly surrounding the interactions between her daughter and her older sibling. Although it was not entirely clear what the specific issues were, it was evident that she was concerned this would result in her daughter not being able to flourish in the way she believed she could. However, she also felt that this source of stress has a positive influence on the quality of her relationship with her daughter, as reflected in the following segment of her interview:

Interviewer: Do you think that those [family] dynamics and those relationships [have]...contributed...to your relationship with her?

Mary: Yes because I'm extremely protective of her...you know she has a lot of confidence and I don't want her to be taken advantage of...[The stress] is positive in terms of our relationship...between her and I, but I don't think its necessarily a positive thing for her as an individual.

Therefore, it is apparent that Mary believes these family concerns could impact negatively on her daughter in the future. However, relative to the mother-daughter relationship, she also indicated that this source of stress brings them closer as a result of her concern for her daughter's well-being. Consistent with Mary, Stephanie also indicates a source of stress within her family that she perceives to have a positive influence on her relationship with her daughter:

Stephanie: I mean my biggest concern is working right, and I work a lot. So, and that's...I mean that's an impact on children who have parents who work a lot, and I have a lot of demands on me from that standpoint.

Interviewer: Do you perceive any sort of impact on your relationship at all based on your work?

Stephanie: I actually think in some ways it helps it because she has to be independent, and I'll say to her you know I need you do the following things cause I have to do a couple things for work right now before I can come back to you...and so she has to be responsible.

Thus, although managing work and family life appears to be a stress in Stephanie's life, she is able to perceive it as a way to strengthen and add to the 'maturity' of her relationship with her daughter. This is because she indicated a sense of having to depend on her for certain things, which, in turn, adds a positive quality to their relationship.

In contrast, Carol and Joanne indicate stressors that pose challenges for their relationships with their daughters. As previously mentioned in the analysis of pre-adoption experiences, Carol described difficulties in their family environment due to her daughter's feelings of insecurity toward their family dog. Her daughter often shows resentment toward their pet and frequently tells Carol that she loves the dog more than her. Therefore, Carol comments that this is a source of tension and frustration within their relationship. Furthermore, Joanne also indicated a current source of stress for her, which she then perceives to create difficulties in her relationship with her daughter. Interestingly, while she describes the mother-daughter relationship in very positive terms, she also perceives the level of closeness she shares with her daughter as a significant stressor to their

relationship, as highlighted in the following quote: "She stresses me out all the time now because we are so close and because she is so larger than life and prone to saying the wrong thing." In addition, she perceives this as having a negative influence on their relationship "because perhaps I ride her too hard, I'm watching her all the time."

Therefore, while the closeness of their relationship is a positive consideration, she also interprets this strength as potentially causing tension within their relationship, as she is frequently monitoring her daughter and perhaps exaggerating the extent to which she needs to "mould" her.

Sibling involvement. Although seven of the families that participated had more than one child, Chinese adoptees were the youngest family members in every case. However, it is also important to note that half of the mothers indicated they had adopted twice from China. An interesting finding emerged from three of these five families, as the girls interviewed for the present study experienced the adoption of a younger sibling from China (in the other two cases, the girls were the youngest adoptees). As indicated by these mothers, this created a unique influence on the quality of their relationships with their older daughters, as they had to adjust to having a younger sibling adopted into the family. Consistent with this, Marilyn stated, "Well our [relationship] changed when [her sister] came along, that was difficult for her...she's been queen bee for a few years and now she has to share her [mom]." More specifically, this experience was perceived to actually assist in alleviating some of the previously mentioned dependency issues, as the girls had to learn to share their mother's attention with another child. Stephanie commented:

When it was just one on one...she was more possessive of me, and then when [her sister] came along I think it loosened that relationship, or loosened the grip a little

bit...she realizes she can share me and I don't go away.

Although questions involving sibling relationships were not part of the interview guide as previously outlined, the conversation with Stephanie's daughter Alexis spontaneously brought forth this issue, as she also discussed her younger sister's adoption in a similar manner:

Well [our relationship] was sort of different at first cause I was only 6 so I was sort of jealous that sometimes my sister would get more attention, but my mom was always there to be like 'okay Alexis you can sit on my lap now too'. So she always treats us the same.

Here, Alexis retrospectively discussed how she felt when her sister was adopted, but does not suggest that this created any significant difficulties for her relationship with her mom. Rather, she seems to be appreciative of what her mother does in order to embrace her relationships with both of her daughters. Taken together, while it is not surprising that a new sibling would create some feelings of uncertainty for the girls in these families, it is interesting that this experience could also be perceived to influence the relationship in a positive manner. More specifically, this finding also emphasizes the importance of considering the dynamic *process* with international adoption, as a link was made between pre-adoption care, a post-adoption family experience, and the outcome this has on the quality of mother-daughter relations. Finally, it is important to note that there were also instances of families with older biological children; however, perceptions linking these siblings to the quality of parent-child relationships were not found in the interviews.

Summary of findings – How are Post-Adoption Family Experiences Associated With the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships? Overall, it is clear that both mothers and

children perceived a wide variety of post-adoption family experiences as having an impact on the quality of their relationships. Two closely related issues included the identification of being a transracial family and participating in cultural socialization, both of which were perceived as adding to the positive quality of mother-daughter relationships. Perhaps this latter finding was largely a result of both mothers and daughters perceptions that these experiences added a unique aspect to their interactions (e.g., increased communication, embracing where the girls came from, and being able to spend more time together).

Moreover, discussions surrounding each girl's adoption story were an important component of mother-daughter relationships, and were identified by the children as adding to the positive quality of their relationships with their mothers. This was noted through sharing the details of their adoption story, in addition to issues surrounding their birth mothers, which were interestingly linked back to some of the previously noted outcomes of pre-adoption adversity. In addition, various post-adoption stressors were identified and in some cases were perceived to present challenges to the mother-daughter relationship.

However, in other cases these obstacles actually were viewed as having a positive influence on the quality of mother-daughter relationships. Finally, sibling involvement was also an important consideration among some of these families, but did not seem to present any challenges to the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. In fact, some mothers suggested that sibling involvement might have mitigated the negative impact of early institutionalized care by decreasing their daughter's fear of abandonment and dependency, thus helping to improve the quality of the mother-daughter relationship.

Altogether, in this study both mothers and children highlighted a number of issues as being related to the quality of their relationships. Interestingly, however, this study's

findings show that both mothers and daughters perceive these factors as generally enhancing the quality of their relationships; this was particularly evident in relation to discussions of the adoption process and engagement in cultural socialization activities. Moreover, these findings also suggest resilience within these families with respect to overcoming early adversity and indicating generally positive relationships as a result.

Discussion

This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews with Canadian adoptive parents and their adopted Chinese children, with the goal of elucidating their understanding of the ways in which pre- and post-adoption experiences might be associated with the quality of their relationships. This study's findings highlight the positive relationships shared between adoptive parents and their children. Specifically, all of the participants in this study perceived the mother-daughter relationship to be positive, loving, and characterized by cohesion and intimacy.

In addition, open and frequent communication was also noted by both mothers and daughters. However, some mothers reported that the specific amount and type of information shared within the mother-daughter relationship was beginning to vary as their daughters grow older. Furthermore, while the mothers and their daughters in this study reported having some disagreements and conflicts with one another, these were perceived as being fairly mundane and trivial in nature, having relatively little impact on the quality of their relationship overall. Nonetheless, in interpreting these findings, it is important to note that the family-based changes and dynamics reported by mothers and their daughters are reflective of parent-child relationships in general during this developmental period, namely pre-adolescence and adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). For example, it is well

documented within the literature related to the family context during the pre-adolescent and adolescent stages of development that notable shifts in interpersonal relations (e.g., increase in number of conflicts, decrease in communication) take place during this time, and that these shifts coincide with adolescents' desire for greater autonomy (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In turn, this often creates emotional challenges for both parents and children (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In addition, shifts in cognitive development, coupled with a desire for increased autonomy and independence, often results in changes in the way pre-adolescents approach decision making within an interpersonal context (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Therefore, the shifts indicated by some of the families in this study (i.e., changes in the amount of information shared, minor conflicts over everyday mundane issues) are consistent with previous research findings, and do not suggest that parent-child relationships within internationally adoptive families are necessarily characterized by uniquely problematic issues. Taken together, this study's findings suggest that mother-daughter relationships within the context of internationally adoptive Canadian families were perceived as being characterized by generally open, intimate and positive, rather than negative, interactions.

In discussing the findings relative to each research question explored in the present study, it is important to recall the proposed ecological framework that was derived from a review of the literature on international adoption (Figure 1). The purpose of this model was to highlight a variety of contextual factors relevant to understanding the outcomes of international adoption, and in this study the specific focus was on perceptions of the quality of parent-child relationships. Reference will be made to this framework when discussing the findings for each of this study's research questions.

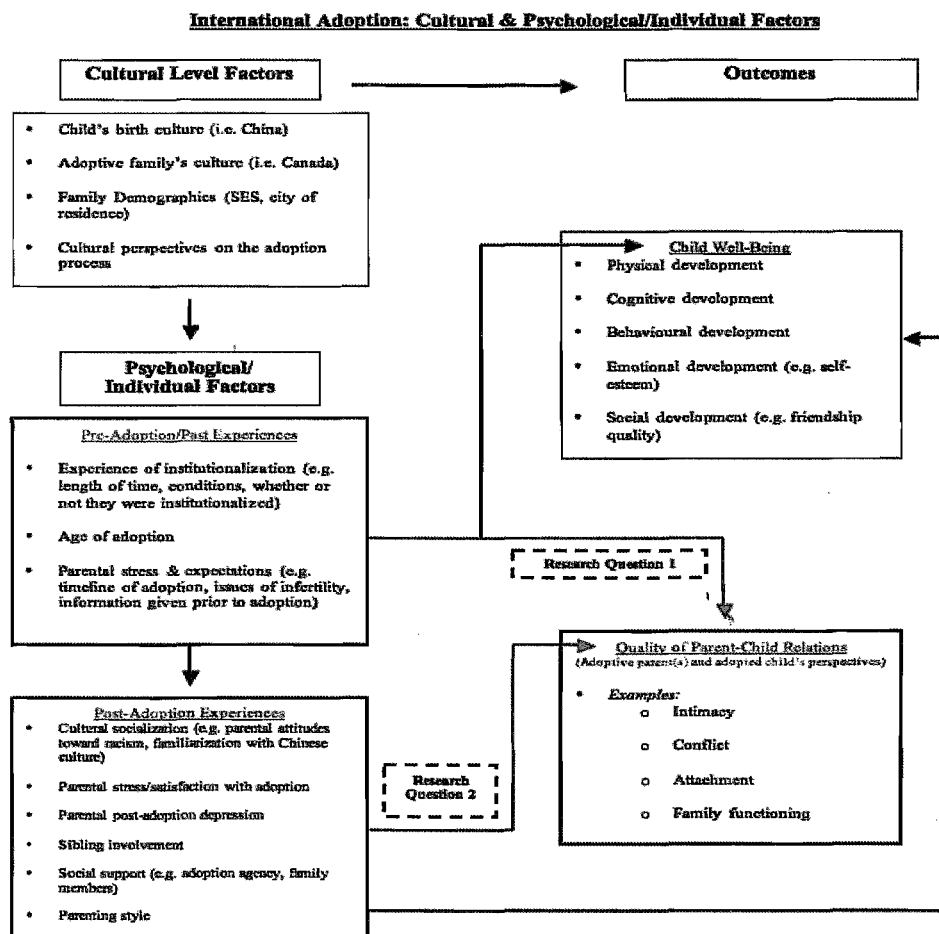


Figure 1: An ecological model presenting some of the factors associated with successful child and family outcomes in the context of Chinese adoption in Canada

Note: The real arrows indicate the associations and research questions explored in the present study

Pre-Adoption Experiences and the Perceived Association with the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

As outlined in Figure 1, early institutionalization, age at time of adoption, and parental stress/expectations have all been highlighted in previous research as having an influential impact on parent-child relationships within the context of international adoption (Chisholm, 1998; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Marcovitch et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 2003; Rutter et al., 2007; Smyke et al., 2010; van Londen et al., 2007; Viana & Welsh, 2010; Wilson, 2009). Consistent with previous research, one of the most noteworthy

findings in this study was the considerable impact that early institutionalization had on parent-child relationships, as perceived by both mothers and their daughters. Interestingly, the unique impact of this early adversity was described by mothers in two ways. First, mothers perceived early institutionalization as a challenge in developing positive and open relationships with their daughters. Second, mothers also perceived early institutionalization as a means through which to strengthen their relationships with their daughters.

Several research studies have documented attachment-based difficulties in parent-child relationships, thus underscoring the challenge of early institutionalization for adoptive families (e.g., O'Connor et al., 2003). However, few studies have explored other aspects of parent-child relationships, or how attachment-based difficulties develop, unfold, or resolve themselves over time, within internationally adoptive families. Accordingly, the qualitative nature of this study, which relied on in-depth interviews with mothers and daughters, contributes to the current literature on international adoption and the highlights several unique and key themes to further our understanding of early institutionalization and parent-child relationship quality within adoptive families.

The first theme to emerge from the interviews was related to the children's fear of abandonment and dependency on their mothers, a theme which was often raised by both mothers and their children. In this study, several mothers indicated their daughter's fear of being left alone or the need to have their mothers within close proximity at all times. While this manifested in day-to-day interactions, it also was commonly related to disturbances in sleeping behaviours as well. In addition, while more indirectly, a couple of children also reflected this fear of abandonment when discussing more current interactions with their mothers. Although these children were not specifically asked to comment on this issue,

their fear of abandonment insecurities spontaneously emerged within the interview process. This latter finding underscores the significant and long-term impact of early institutionalization on later relationships within adoptive families (Schaffer, 2000). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the positive quality of parent-child relationships, as reported by mothers and daughters, seemed to persist regardless of children's difficulties with abandonment/dependency issues. This finding might reflect a unique aspect of this group of internationally adoptive families, as these mothers may be highly motivated to ensure that the adoption process is successful and thus inclined to perceive potential challenges as one way to strengthen their relationships with their adopted child.

This latter possibility is consistent with this study's finding that several mothers also perceived children's early institutionalization experiences as a means through which to strengthen their relationships with their daughters. For example, several mothers described how their daughters' experience of institutionalized care provided an opportunity to modify their approach to parenting in a way that strengthened the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. Although previous research has demonstrated signs of *resilience* within families who have adopted internationally (i.e. secure attachment classifications were noted within samples of institutionalized, internationally adopted children by Marcovitch et al., 1997 and O'Connor et al., 2003), the overwhelmingly positive perceptions that mothers shared in this study regarding their children's behaviours was unexpected. It seems that the mothers in this study may construe their children's behaviours (e.g. fear of abandonment and dependency) as a positive (rather than a negative) challenge, and as a means to ensure intimacy, trust, and attachment security within the mother-daughter relationship. Parenting research has long demonstrated that

parents' understanding of their children's behaviour is often a dynamic process that is influenced by changing daily interactions and contexts within the family environment (Bugental, Johnston, New, & Silvester, 1998; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). This dynamic process is reflected in the way that the mothers in this study altered their approach to parenting so as to better meet their children's emotional needs, which have been largely shaped by their experiences with early institutionalization. Interestingly, three of the mothers in this study also had older biological children, and these mothers also reported modifying their approach to parenting to facilitate positive parent-child relationships, thus underscoring the unique nature of adoptive versus biological child-rearing.

However, it is still not clear why many of the mothers in this study perceived their children's experiences with early institutionalized care, and the challenging behaviours often resulting from this care, as a means to strengthen the mother-daughter relationship. As previously suggested, perhaps it is because this group of mothers was highly motivated to receive a child and also generally had positive perceptions of the adoption process. In turn, this may have increased their ability to perceive any challenging circumstances arising from their daughters' pre-adoption care as an opportunity to cement the joy felt by the experience of adoption, and strengthen the parent-child relationship as a result. In addition, it was also found that some of these mothers had a strong desire to compensate for the detrimental experiences their daughters had encountered. Therefore, this may also influence their desire to modify their parenting behaviours and strengthen the quality of the relationship overall. For the most part, the mothers in this study represented a very interesting group in terms of their ability to perceive challenging circumstances in a positive light and in their willingness to adjust their parenting behaviours accordingly.

Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate these parenting qualities in future adoption research. For example, it may be of interest to explore a larger population of adoptive families in order to capture greater variation in parents' reasons and motivation for adopting internationally. The focus on parental and child perceptions in this study allowed for a significantly favourable view of the adoption process to emerge, but less was known about *how* these perceptions developed (or perhaps changed) at the time of adoption and in the years following the adoption. In this way, this study highlighted the contribution that parental and child perceptions can provide for theory and research in the field of adoption. In addition, this study's findings underscore the importance of exploring further the connections among parental expectations and motivation within internationally adoptive families, adoptees' ability to overcome early adversity, and the quality of the parent-child relationships.

In addition to early institutionalization, age at the time of adoption was also explored (see Figure 1) but the mothers in this study did not perceive this as a significant contributor to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Rather, mothers primarily described their appreciation for adopting their daughters as young as they did, while also indicating that they would have loved to receive them as newborns as this might have facilitated the earlier formation of a positive mother-child relationship. Therefore, the age at which their daughters were adopted was not perceived by the mothers as having any particular influence on the quality of their relationship. Nevertheless, the mothers in this study still recognized the potential differences that could have resulted if they had adopted their daughters at a younger versus older age (i.e., it might have been easier to form a positive mother-daughter relationship by adopting a younger, versus older, child).

Similarly, the results of some previous research studies highlight this difficulty in understanding the impact of age of adoption on parent-child relationships (Marcovitch et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 2003). This is because there are a multitude of pre- and post-adoption considerations (e.g. early institutionalization, parental stress) that can influence the quality of the parent-child relationship irrespective of the age the child was adopted (Groze & Ileana, 1996). In addition, it is also noteworthy that in this study the average age of the girls' adoption was 13.5 months – all were fairly young and there was little variation in their ages at the time of adoption. In this regard, this study's findings should be interpreted cautiously, and may not meaningfully generalize to families adopting toddlers, young children, or even youth from other international countries. These latter families may share a different understanding of how age of adoption impacts the quality of relationships between parents and children, and this could be a consideration for future research in this area.

Finally, as outlined in Figure 1, parental stress and expectations were also examined in this study. Consistent with previous literature (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Wilson, 2009; Viana & Welsh, 2010), mothers discussed a variety of stressors that took place prior to or around the time of the adoption. However, the perceived impact of these concerns on the quality of parent-child relationships was minimal, often reported as having little or no influence. In fact, one mother indicated that the stress of the adoption process was a *strengthening* factor in her relationship with her daughter, again reinforcing the previously mentioned finding that many of the mothers in this study perceived challenges in a positive manner.

However, it is also important to consider the mothers' pre-adoption expectations

and/or level of preparedness because these factors might be related to their current perceptions of challenges. For example, one finding of this study was that some mothers perceived their involvement with the adoption agency as playing a large role in preparing them for both the adoption process and problematic child behaviours (e.g., developmental delays). Therefore, this social support in the form of involvement with the adoption agency may have prepared mothers in advance to deal with stressful circumstances, thus allowing them more energy to concentrate on forming positive connections with their newly adopted child. In fact, one mother reinforced this possibility by suggesting that her cautious expectations regarding her daughter's physical and socio-emotional capacities actually made it easier for her to establish a positive bond with her daughter because she was *well-prepared* to deal with potential challenges.

In turn, these findings both add to and challenge the existing body of research that examines the impact of stress within internationally adoptive families. For example, it has been noted that adoptive parents often feel isolated and anxious, as the lingering impacts of institutionalization are difficult for other families to understand and provide assistance in dealing with (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Mainemer et al., 1998). However, this study's findings suggest that the level of preparedness offered by the adoption agency provides a means of social support regarding such concerns prior to the adoption process. Therefore, the positive outcomes noted among the families in this study can be attributed largely to the efforts of pre-adoption preparation, which helps to reduce stress, and in turn supports the formation and maintenance of positive parent-child relationships. Overall, while any family is certain to experience stress, it is apparent that these mothers perceived stress as having either a minimal impact on, or as actually helping to strengthen, the quality of

relationships shared with their daughters. Again, this finding underscores the overall positive perceptions illustrated throughout the mothers' interviews, in addition to the high degree of preparedness that was gained through their involvement with adoption agencies.

Implications. This study's findings highlight the impact of various pre-adoption experiences on the quality of mother-daughter relationships within 10 Canadian families that have adopted internationally from China (see Figure 1). Taken together, it appears as though these experiences (i.e., institutionalization, age at adoption, and parental stress/expectations) have posed some significant challenges to the quality of relationships, as reported by both mothers and their daughters. However, this study's findings also reveal a great deal of flexibility and resiliency within these families. For example, by modifying their parenting approaches to better suit their children's needs and by perceiving challenges as a strength, the mothers in this study are going a long way toward helping their children overcome some of the difficulties associated with pre-adoption experiences and toward establishing positive relationships with them. A desire on the part of parents to perceive the associated challenges of pre-adoption experiences as a strength toward establishing positive parent-child relationships might simply reflect highly motivated internationally adoptive families that are well prepared in advance by adoption agencies to deal with potential adoption-related problems.

As a result, it is important for adoption agencies to continue to inform future adoptive families of the resilience that can be experienced in the face of early adversity and that the parent-child relationship is a key consideration in achieving positive child- and family-based outcomes. Furthermore, as noted in this study's findings, adoption agencies may also benefit by understanding the full influence of parental expectations and

motivations for adopting internationally on the formation and maintenance of positive parent-child relationships. As a result, agencies could then encourage prospective parents to anticipate generally positive adoption outcomes through promoting patience and perseverance as a way to better prepare families for the adoption process. The mothers and daughters in this study reported substantially positive qualities within the parent-child relationship, thus highlighting the long term benefits of pre-adoption preparation on the part of parents. This study's findings seem to suggest that when parents expect and are prepared in advance to deal with adoption-related challenges they are better able to establish a positive and trusting relationship with their adopted child over time.

In addition, this study's findings are also important theoretically, particularly when considering their relevance to the "early experience assumption" (Schaffer, 2000). There were notable challenges that emerged as a result of the early adversity experienced by the daughters in this study, which provides some support for this the notion that early experiences have a significant and lasting impact on later development. However, the findings presented here suggest that children and their families can overcome even the most dire early experiences (e.g. institutionalization) and enjoy positive relationships with one another. Moreover, this study's findings show how parent-child relationships can moderate or alleviate the impact of early adversity and facilitate the development and maintenance of positive relationships within internationally adoptive families.

Finally, the results reported in this study also have implications when considering dominant cultural perspectives on international adoption (see Figure 1). More specifically, it is important to consider how the mothers' perspectives on adoption, as shared in this study, fit within the key perspectives surrounding adoption in the larger Canadian cultural

context. It is important to note that the perspectives of the mothers in this study were not unmediated points of view. Rather, they reflected broader Canadian cultural perspectives about the process of international adoption, and were likely integral in guiding the mothers' perceptions of their children's experiences and development, and their parenting approaches. For example, as previously discussed, international adoption is commonly thought to pose significant challenges for families (e.g., developmental delays, health concerns). This is particularly the case when adopted children have experienced institutionalized care, as these children have often experienced early adversity (e.g., Groza et al., 2003; Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2003). As a result, Canadian adoption agencies (and adoption agencies in other countries) prepare adoptive families extensively throughout the entire adoption process, and this preparation stems directly from the understanding and perspective that the adoption process can be particularly challenging. This approach was supported by this study's findings, as several mothers indicated the significant number of seminars and information sessions they were required to attend throughout the adoption process.

Taking this into consideration, the results of this study are consistent with the dominant Canadian cultural perspectives about international adoption, as some pre-adoption experiences (e.g., early institutionalization) were perceived to be associated with struggles and difficulties by several mothers (e.g., abandonment/dependency issues). However, what is important here is the manner in which these mothers understood these central notions regarding adoption. For example, by perceiving adoption difficulties as a positive challenge or opportunity, the mothers in this study indicated that they were led to modify their approach to parenting to meet the unique needs of their adopted child. It is

possible that with extensive preparation by the adoption agency, the mothers in this study were very well informed throughout the adoption process and in anticipation of receiving their daughters. Therefore, by modifying their approach to parenting, they may have compensated for the challenges and early adverse experiences that their daughters encountered prior to adoption. In fact, this line of thinking is supported by this study's findings, as some of the mothers suggested that they parented their adopted daughters differently from their older, biological children. In light of this study's findings, there is a need for future research that addresses the broader cultural context within which international adoption occurs. For example, it is possible that over time the dominant cultural perspectives about the adoption process could shift to emphasize the resiliency and positive outcomes experienced by these families, and it would be interesting to understand the significance of such a cultural shift in perspective on the quality of relationships among internationally adoptive families.

Post-Adoption Experiences and the Perceived Association with the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Figure 1 outlines several post-adoption factors relevant to the quality of parent-child relationships within the context of internationally adoptive families including cultural socialization, social support, sibling involvement, parental satisfaction with adoption, and parenting style. Several of these factors emerged as being important to understanding the quality of mother-daughter relationships.

First, the mothers in this study perceived differences in birth cultures within their families as an important factor contributing to the positive quality of their relationships with their daughters. Moreover, they also placed considerable emphasis on the importance

of cultural socialization. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Johnston et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006), the mothers in this study strongly believed in the importance of familiarizing their daughters with aspects of Chinese culture. Both mothers and children were able to indicate a variety of ways that Chinese cultural practices were integrated into their family environments, including involvement in *Chinese New Year* and *Autumn Moon Festival*, Chinese cooking, Chinese dance classes, and getting together with others in the adoption community or from their own adoption groups.

In addition, both mothers and children viewed cultural socialization as a positive aspect in their lives and something they enjoyed participating in together. However, it is also important to note that in some cases participants mentioned that the degree to which they engaged in these activities was changing as the girls were growing older and expressing a desire to engage in more peer-related activities. It was not as though cultural socialization activities were no longer important within the family context, but simply that they were not incorporated as frequently as when the girls were younger. Interestingly, this might explain why the mothers in this study were so highly motivated to participate in these practices during the early years because they wanted to introduce their daughters to aspects of their birth culture early on.

Nonetheless, this study contributes to the body of research highlighting the importance of cultural socialization for international adoptees (e.g. Johnston et al., 2007), as involvement in these activities associated with Chinese culture was also perceived as a means to strengthen the parent-child relationship by both mothers and daughters. This was described both in terms of adding opportunities to spend time with each other while participating in these activities, as well as solidifying a shared sense of the girls' birth

culture and increasing levels of intimacy and communication within the mother-daughter relationship. In turn, this special time spent together can increase feelings of connectedness and trust within the mother-daughter relationship, while simultaneously increasing the girls' knowledge of their cultural background. Moreover, this knowledge of one's own cultural background is especially important because it has been deemed an important factor for later positive development in international adoptees (Lee, 2003).

Outside of issues pertaining to culture, it is noteworthy that international adoption also often involves the formation of a transracial family. Specifically in the case of Chinese adoption, there is the issue of visible racial differences to consider regardless of whether or not adoptive families choose to participate in cultural socialization. Therefore, the mothers in this study also discussed how they negotiate these differences outside of cultural socialization, as characteristics pertaining to physical appearance were also related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. In this regard, a key finding in this study is that mothers tended to perceive racial differences between themselves and their daughters as an asset to establishing positive mother-daughter relationships. The mothers in this study perceived racial differences as providing an additional opportunity to engage in insightful conversations that could build intimacy and connectedness within the parent-child relationship. However, it was not possible to explore this issue with the children in this study because some of the mothers believed that their daughters were still too young to understand the full relevance of living within a transracial family. This perceived difficulty in understanding the concept of transracial families is consistent with research showing that pre-adolescence is a time characterized by physical, emotional, and cognitive changes (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Therefore, it may not be until later in adolescence that children's

understanding of racial differences becomes crystallized. Thus, it would be beneficial to explore the issue of transracial family dynamics further with a sample of older internationally adopted children.

A key unexpected finding of this study was reflected in discussions that familiarized the girls with their adoption stories. While this was closely linked to cultural socialization in the sense that it involved sharing aspects pertaining to adoption and coming from a Chinese background, these stories emphasized the *unique* characteristics of each family and the incredibly diverse experiences they had encountered during the adoption process. In this study, disclosing the details of each girl's journey to her adoptive home was perceived to be very important by both mothers and daughters. This is consistent with previous research which suggests that internationally adoptive families feel strongly about disseminating the details of the adoption story to their children in order to make them feel comfortable with their status both as adoptees and within the family unit (Goldberg, 2001).

However, this study's findings contribute in a unique way to the current literature because it offers a glimpse at the adoptees' point of view about these issues. It was apparent that almost all of the girls in this study were knowledgeable about various aspects of their adoption experiences (as told to them by their parents) and were interested and curious to learn this information. Similar to the responses provided by their mothers, some daughters reported a positive adoption story and discussed how this positive story facilitated the formation of a positive mother-daughter relationship. For example, many of the daughters expressed appreciation and gratitude toward their mothers, as they understood the early adversity they had experienced and were grateful to have been

adopted. On the other hand, it also became clear that some of the girls were still negotiating their feelings toward both their birth and adoptive mothers and their adoption experiences in general, while simultaneously reflecting some of the concerns previously noted such as experiences associated with early adversity and institutionalized care (e.g., fear of abandonment). This pattern of findings suggests that although the issue of adoption has been discussed within these families from an early age, some girls may still be working toward solidifying their identity as an internationally adopted child and addressing some of the tension they feel in sorting through their feelings regarding this issue. Therefore, as identity formation is a common *developmental task* during the pre-adolescent and adolescent stage (Steinberg & Silk, 2002), the confounding impact of feelings associated with birth parents and one's adoption history may make it difficult for adopted children to form an integrated and meaningful identity during pre-adolescence.

Nevertheless, it is important to also consider that not one of the girls in the present study discussed any negative feelings toward her adoptive mother when discussing her birth family or adoption history, nor did these discussions elucidate any difficulties within the parent-child relationship. This, again, highlights the importance of the parent-child relationships in this sample, specifically when considering the flexibility and resilience they conveyed in dealing with adoption-related challenges. Further evaluation of adopted children's perspectives about their adoption histories is important for future research, as it is evident that this was of particular concern within this study and warrants additional exploration.

In addition to issues pertaining to race and culture, parental stress and satisfaction with the adoption process also emerged as a consideration in this study (see Figure 1). As

previously mentioned, mothers viewed the process and outcome of adoption in substantially favourable terms, and therefore satisfaction with the adoption process was not in any way thought to contribute negatively to the quality of parent-child relationships. Consistent with previous research (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Wilson, 2009), several of the mothers in this study reported experiencing post-adoption stress both personally and within the family environment. However, there were inconsistencies when examining the particular impact of these stressors on the quality of parent-child relationships, as less than half the mothers thought that the stressors they were experiencing had any impact on their relationships with their daughters and only two mothers perceived these stressors as a challenge to the mother-daughter relationship. Every family experiences stress within their day-to-day lives; therefore, this latter finding might reflect strong maternal motivation to overcome these daily stressors and to not let them interfere with the success of the adoption process or the experience of positive relationships with their daughters. Interestingly, one mother attributed the *closeness* of her relationship with her daughter as being one source of stress for their relationship, as she was constantly worried about helping her daughter to become a well-rounded and happy child. Therefore, this finding may reinforce the previously discussed suggestion that the mothers in this study were highly motivated to establish and maintain strong and positive mother-daughter relationships, so much so that they also sometimes viewed closeness and intimacy with their daughters as a source of stress.

Finally, also consistent with the ecological framework, sibling interactions were perceived as having an influence on the quality of parent-child relationships. While this was more directly indicated by the mothers, one of the children also implicitly reflected

this idea as well. Particularly referring to the adoption of a younger sibling from China, mothers and their daughters talked about how this was a strength and positive contributor to the quality of the relationships they shared. For these adopted girls, having another younger sibling adopted from China was thought to help in working through some of lasting effects of early adversity (i.e., fear of abandonment and dependency) as they had to learn to share their mothers' attention. Along these lines, another daughter reported that she thought that having a younger sibling was good because she was able to recognize that her mother made a strong effort to spend time equally with her and her newly adopted sister. In this case, rather than her younger sibling being viewed as a threat to the relationship she shared with her mother, this child was able to describe the appreciation she felt toward her mother in trying to balance these relationships fairly. Therefore, it is possible that the effort put forth by the mothers in this study to form positive and secure relationships with their daughters and assist them in overcoming the effects of early adversity actually allowed the girls to view the adoption of their new sister as a positive experience and to demonstrate flexibility and resilience in light of early adverse experiences.

Therefore, in addition to the importance of the parent-child relationship, future research may also consider the broader family-based dynamics in which a younger Chinese sibling was adopted. Perhaps because they could share a common experience with their sibling, the girls in this study were able to feel more comfortable and develop their identity (as described earlier by Steinberg & Silk, 2002) both as an adopted Chinese child and as a member of their family unit. Interestingly, some of the girls in this study were also adopted into families that already included older adopted siblings. Therefore, it would also be

interesting to explore the influence of this latter (and other kinds of) family dynamic(s) for individual- and family-based outcomes within international adoptees.

Implications. In considering the many post-adoption family experiences that could impact the quality of parent-child relationships, a key finding of this study concerned the birth culture and racial differences between mothers and their adopted children. As the process of international adoption results in the creation of a transracial family and brings forth concerns surrounding cultural socialization and the sharing of adoption stories, adoption agencies and future adoptive families need to understand the importance of addressing these issues with their adopted children. Based on the findings of this study, it is very apparent that the parent-child relationship was strengthened by a mutual understanding of the child's adoption story and the cultural milieu of their birth country. Not only did mothers and their daughters in this study perceive the exploration of these issues as contributing positively to the quality of their relationships through increased communication and connectedness, but they felt that their relationships became a means through which these issues could be addressed and embraced in a unique way. Therefore, it is evident that these are important considerations for prospective adoptive families to understand in terms of the importance of the parent-child relationship.

Finally, this study's findings indicated that both mothers and daughters emphasized the experience of parental stressors and the introduction of a new sibling in strengthening the quality of their relationships, which in turn helped the daughters to more easily overcome the negative impact of early adversity (i.e., early institutionalized care). These are also both important findings for adoption agencies to consider, particularly with reference to the interesting role that adopting a younger sibling seemed to play in reducing

the effects of early adversity, strengthening the parent-child relationship, and potentially, the girls' adoptive identity. As previously discussed, this is an important consideration for prospective studies as these findings may allow for adoption agencies to speak to the advantages of adopting more than one child.

Theoretical Implications

The findings presented in this study are also important to consider within the context of the predominant theoretical perspective outlined in this research. As discussed previously, the ecological systems theory as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979), emphasizes the importance of considering a variety of contexts and experiences when conceptualizing an individual's development; and more importantly, how these contexts interact with each other in order to produce subjective and unique developmental outcomes. Taking this into account, the results of this study inform this theoretical perspective in two key ways.

First, although the interview questions for both the parent and child were created using experiences highlighted in previous literature as a starting point, they were primarily open-ended and allowed mothers and daughters to reveal any relevant experiences they wished to share. Interestingly, even with this minimal guidance and probing, the use of the ecological systems theory within this study was shown to be very relevant, as the participants spoke of experiences relative to each level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model (i.e. microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). For example, referring to the macrosystem, participants spoke of experiences relative to cultural socialization and making strong efforts to achieve a balance between both Chinese and Canadian culture within the family environment. In addition, in reference to the exosystem level,

participants repeatedly indicated the important influence and contribution of the adoption agencies they utilized, both prior to and after the time of the adoption. Finally, when considering the microsystem level, mothers and their daughters also highlighted the influential impact of experiencing the adoption of a younger Chinese sibling. As a result, the relevance of the ecological systems theory within the scope of research on international adoption was very apparent, and the applicability of this theory within this population of families was shown through the variety of experiences shared by both mothers and children in this study.

Secondly, an important focus of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical perspective is emphasizing that the contexts, which interact and influence developmental outcomes, are not be experienced in one uniform manner by all individuals. Instead, he stresses the idea that each context is interpreted in subjective ways, varying extensively between individuals. Therefore, the same situation or set of encounters can mean very different things to different people, and can also have significantly different impacts on their overall developmental trajectory. Taking this into consideration, the results of this study also inform this aspect of the ecological systems theory, as not only did the participants identify a wide range of experiences throughout the interviews, but also attributed very different meanings to these experiences as well. For example, half of the mothers indicated that they had already traveled back to China with their daughters (and families) in order to visit their orphanages and allow them to experience Chinese culture. However, while some mothers referenced this trip as an emotionally turbulent experience whereby their daughters struggled to come to terms with the reality of their adoption story, other mothers described this experience as a really wonderful opportunity to visit China and enjoy a family

vacation together. Therefore, it is apparent that the same experience was perceived very differently by these families, and would no doubt create varying outcomes within each level of the ecological system.

Taken together, it is evident that the findings of this research coincide well with the theoretical basis of the ecological systems theory as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). In turn, however, it is also important to consider how some of the limitations within the present study can also continue to inform this perspective within future research as well. For example, one shortcoming of this study, from a macrosystem orientation, is that the families were all located within southern Ontario, and also relatively close to the adoption agencies and the city of Toronto (which provides a multitude of opportunities for cultural socialization). Therefore, it would be advantageous for future research to consider examining families outside the macrosystem of southern Ontario, and perhaps on the East coast of Canada or in the northern areas of the provinces and/or territories. This change in the broader context within which the families in this study were situated, would allow for an exploration of how other aspects of the ecological system may be impacted as a result of this geographical difference.

Furthermore, an additional limitation of this study was the inclusion of only the *mothers'* relationships with their daughters (to be discussed further in the subsequent section). Therefore, future research that incorporates other family members' perspectives (i.e. adoptive father, siblings) may extend the examination of the microsystem, and allow for more dyadic, and perhaps triadic and quadratic, interactions to also be considered within the child's overall development. Moreover, this may also allow for aspects of attachment theory to be examined, as the multiple attachments that these children have

presumably formed with other members of their family may speak to the quality of these relationships and family functioning overall. On the other hand, it may also reveal potential difficulties and an additional impact of early institutionalized care if it seemed as though the girls' relationships with their mothers were the most predominant bonds within their immediate environment.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this research addresses some of the gaps in previous literature on international adoption, there are also limitations to consider. First, while the findings presented here allow for a further examination of the perceived quality of parent-child relationships within Canadian families who have adopted a child from China, the findings cannot be generalized in any meaningful way to a broader population of internationally adoptive families. However, future research can use these outcomes as a point of comparison for other countries from which international adoption occurs. This would be particularly interesting for countries where the extent of early adversity is different from China (e.g., less institutionalized care, increased placements in foster homes), or where the children may be older (or younger) when adopted. It is also noteworthy that in this study all of the child adoptees were female and that very few male adoptions occur in the context of China (Johnson, 2002). Therefore, it would also be beneficial to explore families who have adopted male children, and consider if gender differences play a role in the quality of parent-child relationships. For example, perhaps genetic and/or temperamental differences may allow male children to more or less easily overcome the impact of early adversity. Overall, because there are a variety of other countries where such adoptions take place (e.g. Russia, Ethiopia), it would be interesting to compare this study's findings with those

involving other internationally adoptive families. Such a comparison might allow for a broader understanding of the association between international adoption and family relationships, as adoption is increasingly becoming a more sought-after method of creating a family (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009; Lee et al., 2006). Therefore, as research pertaining to child development and parenting is constantly evolving (Steinberg & Silk, 2002), increasing our understanding of family relationships within internationally adoptive families is a key consideration as it applies to many families worldwide.

Second, although the age of the children interviewed in this study was carefully and strategically chosen in order to allow for a meaningful interview process, it may have been possible to elicit more detailed information from an older population. Although the children were all familiar with and able to discuss their individual adoption stories and activities pertaining to cultural socialization, it was difficult for them to consider how these experiences might have impacted the quality of relationship they shared with their mothers. However, a strength of the methodological strategy adopted in this study was thought to reflect the idea that, because the nature of parent-child interactions does not often form a part of everyday conscious thought, more intensive and direct interviewing strategies might help to capture the specific and nuanced meanings of these relationships for parents and their children. Therefore, although the children in this study provided less detailed information than expected, this study's findings add to the growing body of adoption research as the in-depth interviews elicited meaningful data from the adoptees. As a suggestion for future research, studies could also utilize a longitudinal design and conduct multiple interviews and detailed observations to fully capture participants' (especially children's) thoughtful perceptions on how the adoption process has contributed to the

quality of relationships within their families.

Furthermore, another limitation of this study involves the characteristics of the participants. From the hundreds of flyers that were distributed through the adoption agency, as well as utilizing the personal networks of participants, only 13 families came forward with a desire to participate (three of the families withdrew their interest for personal reasons prior to scheduling an interview). Although such a small sample size was desired and was consistent with the methodological design of this study, it might suggest that the families who did come forward to participate were very highly motivated to share their Chinese adoption stories. In addition, the families that participated in this study were all presumably comfortable in talking about their relationships with their daughters and other experiences pertaining to the adoption process. In turn, this may have resulted in a group of participants that was positively biased toward overcoming early adversity, familiarizing their children with Chinese culture, and emphasizing the positive experiences of adoption within their family environments. However, it may also suggest a unique characteristic of internationally adoptive families, particularly from China, as they have put an immense amount of time and energy into the adoption process and are clearly motivated to become parents to these children. As a result, future research could perhaps consider a larger sample of internationally adoptive families from China and compare with other countries to assess whether these positive perceptions are characteristic of adoptive families more generally, or whether they are reflective of individual differences among adoptive families.

Finally, although each family had the opportunity to choose which parent would be interviewed, in this study only the mothers were involved. It was apparent that families

chose mothers for the interviews because it was believed that they would provide the most meaningful account of parent-child relations. However, as a result, fathers' viewpoints were absent from this study, and this is an area to consider for future research. Moreover, exploring family relationships more broadly would also be interesting for prospective studies, as this study's findings also demonstrated the importance of sibling relationships. Therefore, speaking with other members of the immediate family and gathering their perceptions on the quality of family relations may help to understand the dynamics of internationally adoptive families more generally.

In conclusion, an exploration of pre- and post-adoption family experiences within this sample of families who adopted internationally from China highlights the importance of the parent-child relationship in negotiating some of the challenges that can be associated with the process of international adoption. This study's findings suggest that the adoption process was significantly integrated within these families' day-to-day interactions, both in considering cultural socialization and discussing the girls' unique adoption stories. Perhaps most importantly, this study's findings highlight the dynamic and ongoing nature of the international adoption process among Canadian adoptive families. Mothers and children both emphasized how the adoption process was continually considered in the day-to-day maintenance of positive family relationships. For example, while the impact of institutionalized care may not have been a particularly salient issue, mothers stated that this aspect of pre-adoption adversity no doubt contributed to how relationships were formed and currently maintained within their families (e.g., mothers reported modifying their parenting strategies to suit their daughter's needs). The families in this study seem highly

motivated to not only address these latter concerns at the time of adoption, but to do so over the years as well.

Overall, it is clear that the process of adopting internationally from China can present unique and ongoing challenges in forming and maintaining positive parent-child and family relationships (e.g. impact of early adversity). In adopting an ecological systems framework, however, this study revealed unique and positive connections between a variety of family contexts (i.e., both pre- and post-adoption experiences) and the quality of family relationships within a sample of Canadian families who adopted internationally from China. In the end, the parents and adopted children in this study demonstrated a great deal of flexibility and resilience, as it were, to some of the challenges often associated with international adoption.

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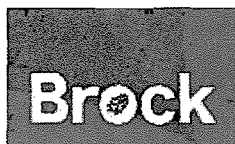
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Appendix A



Brock University
 Research Ethics Board
 Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
 Email: reb@brocku.ca

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 10/8/2010
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: TARDIF-WILLIAMS, Christine - Child & Youth Studies
FILE: 10-057 - TARDIF-WILLIAMS
TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project **STUDENT:** Mallory Dilks
SUPERVISOR: Christine Tardif-Williams
TITLE: Exploring the Family Context for Children Adopted From China: Associations Among Pre-Adoption Factors, Current Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 10/31/2011

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 10/8/2010 to 10/31/2011.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 10/31/2011. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

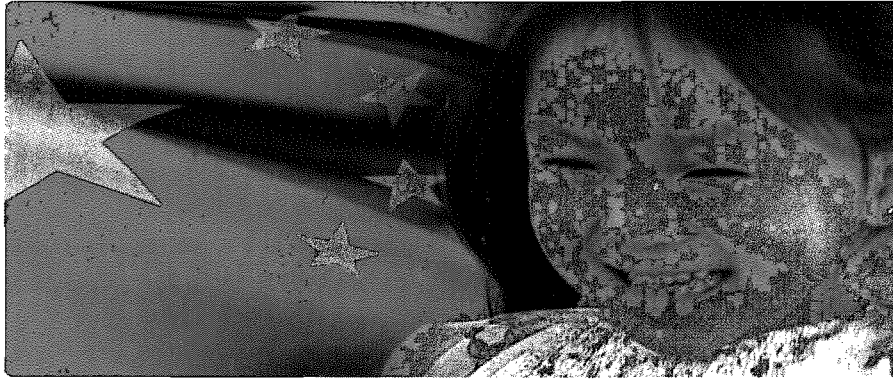
Approved:

Michelle McGinn, Chair
 Research Ethics Board (REB)

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B

ARE YOU A PARENT OF A CHILD ADOPTED FROM CHINA?

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study investigating the link between the adoption process and the quality of parent-child relationships.

Participation will include:

For your child → an interview, approximately 45-60 minutes

For you → an interview, approximately 60-90 minutes

Interviews will take place during only one meeting at your home or another mutually agreed upon public location. Childcare and activities will be available if needed.

Requirements:

Canadian-born parents who have adopted a child from China that is currently between the ages of 8 and 12 years.

All families who participate will receive a restaurant gift certificate valued at \$30 in appreciation for their time.

If you would like to receive further information about this research study, please contact:

Mallory Dilks

Brock University, Graduate Student

md05oq@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, Brock University
905-688-5550 ext. 4557 ctardifwilliams@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board
(file # 10-057)

Appendix C

Information Letter

Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, Associate Professor, Department of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, Ontario, CAN.

Principal Student Investigator: Mallory Dilks, Graduate Student, Department of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, Ontario, CAN.

With the help of *[insert name of adoption agency]*, I am contacting you and your family with an interest in gaining further insight into your experience of raising a child from China.

I, Mallory Dilks, from the Department of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled: "Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships." The main goal of this study is to explore Canadian families who have adopted a child from China and examine associations between pre-adoptive and post-adoption experiences and the quality of parent-child relations, from the perspectives of both parents and their adopted children.

The expected duration of this study is approximately 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. Participation in this study will include interviews for both you and your child. A location for these interviews will be agreed upon between your family and myself. Next, the interviews will take place one following the other in a quiet, confidential location and we will discuss the adoption process and your experiences following the adoption process. It is important to obtain the parent *and* child's perspectives, as they are both imperative to understanding how the adoption process impacts parent-child relationships. As a thank you for participating in this research, your family will be given a modest honorarium in the form of a \$30 gift certificate to be redeemed at a choice of five local restaurants. Childcare and activities will also be available throughout the duration of the parent interview if desired.

This research will benefit you because the findings from this study may provide further information to both current and future adoptive parents and adoption agencies regarding the importance of understanding the link between the adoption process and the quality of parent-child relationships.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca). If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact the Principal Student Investigator, Mallory Dilks, using the email contact information provided below.

Thank you for considering my study.

Mallory Dilks
Graduate Student, Dept. of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University
md05oq@brocku.ca

Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams
Associate Professor, Dept. of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, 905-688-5550 x4557

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file # 10-057)

Appendix D

Parent Interview Guide

Opening Questions

1. What is/are your name(s)?
2. What is your child's name? How old is he/she?
3. What is your current occupational status? What is your partner's current occupational status? (*aims to provide an idea of SES without asking direct questions about income*). What may a typical day look like for you and your family?

Focus of Questions: Adoption Process

As we move into talking about the adoption process and other questions pertaining to your family, I just want to reiterate that the purpose of these interviews is to uncover how you perceive any links between the adoption process and the relationship between you and your child. I am very interested in hearing about all facets of your adoption story and family dynamics, however if I do direct the conversation back toward this focus of parent-child relationships I do not mean to appear insensitive, I just want to be sure that I am able to fulfill the goals I have associated with this interview process. I will also ask for examples a lot, if they are applicable, because sometimes they make it easier to really understand the question we are discussing or it may make it easier to communicate your answer to me.

1. Please think back to when you were first considering adoption. What influenced your decision to adopt a child?
Things to consider: infertility, **parental stress** regarding having children, already having biological or other adopted children, older parents
2. What influenced your decision to adopt a child from China? What was it about this country/form of adoption that interested you?
3. Please describe the adoption process.
Allow the parent to tell their story as they wish, but want to be sure to gather information regarding:
 - a) Any information they have on the child's **pre-adoption experiences**
 - b) The **age of their child when adopted**
 - c) Any challenges they faced throughout the process (perhaps unexpected)
 - d) The trip to China to receive their child
 - e) Emotional challenges
 - f) If they already have children, their reactions?
4. How has your family and friends adjusted overall to the adoption? What has been the easiest part to adjust to? What has been the hardest thing to adjust to?

Focus of Questions: Parent-Child Relations

1. Overall, how would you describe your current relationship with your child? If you could pick 3 words to describe your relationship what would it be? Can you give me **examples** of why you chose these words?
2. In what ways (if any) do you feel your relationship has changed over time?
3. What are the features of your relationship with your child that you enjoy the most? Are there any features that you would like to be different?
4. If you and your child had a disagreement, what would it typically be about? Can you give me an **example**? How would this typically be resolved? How often would you say these conflicts happen? Would you say the frequency and type of arguments you have are more or less similar to other families (i.e. the norm)?
(aims to inquire about the types of conflicts within the relationship and how they are handled)
5. How would you describe your child's openness or willingness to communicate with you? (i.e. with school problems, issues with peers, questions about adoption etc.). Can you give me an **example** of something you and your child may have discussed recently?
(aims to inquire about the level of communication/intimacy within the relationship)

Focus of Questions: Impact of Pre-Adoption Experiences

1. In general, how would you describe the overall impact of international adoption on the relationship with your child and on the functioning of your family?
(aims to provide a starting point into the various pre-adoption and current experiences)
2. If the parent previously indicated they knew information about their child's pre-adoption care, ask:
 - How do you think your child's **pre-adoption history** may or may not have had an impact on the development of your relationship with your child? Why do you feel this way?

If the parent previously indicated they did *not* know any information about their child's pre-adoption care, ask:

 - In general, how do you think that the adoption history for a child adopted from China would have an impact on the development of parent-child relations? Why do you feel this way?
3. How do you feel the **age of your child** when adopted may have had an influence on the development of your relationship with your child? Do you think that this is still relevant currently? Can you give me an **example**?

4. Please think back to the time before the adoption took place. How would you describe your level of **stress and/or expectations** of the adoption process at that time? How would you describe your level of stress currently? What types of things are you stressed about in relation to your family? In what way do you feel as though this has impacted your relationship with your child as she was younger? What about now?
(chose to incorporate pre- and current experiences here so that parental stress doesn't have to be brought up twice)
5. Are there any other considerations from the time prior to the adoption or when the adoption initially took place that you feel could have had an impact on the development of your relationship with your child? Please describe.

Focus of Questions: Impact of Post-Adoption Experiences

1. In general, please describe the extent to which you believe issues of cultural and ethnic identity may have had (or continue to have) an influence on parent-child relations.
-If they indicate that they feel as though these issues have *not* had an impact, ask why they feel this way.
2. Please describe the importance of **familiarizing your child with Chinese culture**? Please expand on why you feel this way.
 - a. Are there any activities relative to Chinese culture that you and/or your child currently participate in? Please describe.
 - b. In what way do you feel as though your decision to (or not to) familiarize your child with Chinese culture has had an influence on the development of your relationship with your child? Why do you feel this way?

If they say it is *not* important, can ask: To what extent do you feel your location plays a role in this decision (if at all?). Do you think if you lived elsewhere you may feel differently on the issue of cultural socialization?

3. Can you describe any other aspects of your current family or cultural environment that you feel have had an impact on your relationship with your child?
(this will touch on any other considerations that are relevant, such as siblings, external support from the agency or community, parenting style)

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything you wish to add to our discussion?
2. Are there any areas relative to our discussion on international adoption and the relationship with your child, which we did not address and you wish to comment on?

Appendix E

Child Interview Guide

Opening Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in at school? What is your favourite subject? *(to build rapport and comfort)*
4. What is your favourite thing to do in your spare time? *(again, to build rapport and comfort)*

Focus of Questions: Adoption Process

Introduce this section by talking about the Chinese adoption that has taken place in my family *(to increase comfort and build rapport)*. Tell them that I would really love to hear all about their adoption because every family's adoption is different and unique.

1. What do you know about your adoption from China? Can you talk to me about your adoption story?
2. How did you learn more about your story? *(expected they will say "my parents")*. How do you feel when your parents talk to you about your adoption? Can you give me an **example** of a time when you felt this way?
3. Have you talked to your friends at school about your adoption? Have you experienced any difficulties with your peers relating to your adoption that you would like to talk about? Can you give me an **example**? *(aims to address any issues of racism or discrimination resulting from the adoption process)*

Focus of Questions: Parent-Child Relations *and* Relevant Experiences

1. If you had to choose 3 words to describe your relationship with your mom/dad, what would you choose? Why do you feel this way?
2. Can you describe any ways that your relationship with your mom/dad has changed over time? Why do you think this is? Can you give me an example?

3. What is your favourite part of your relationship with your mom/dad? Is there anything you wish could be different? For both, can you give me an example? What do you mean by that? *(to see if they can identify any weaknesses within their relationship)*
4. Every family enjoys doing different activities together. Can you describe some examples of activities you and your mom/dad do together? How do these things make you feel about your relationship with your mom/dad? *(aims to address intimacy)*
5. Some families like to talk a lot, and some families may only talk a little. How do you feel about talking to your mom/dad about things that happen in your family, at school, with friends, etc.? Why or why not? What is an example of something you might talk about? *(aims to address communication)*
6. Every family has things that they disagree on, and every family has different things they disagree about. What are some examples of things you and your mom/dad disagree about? How do you resolve these arguments? *(aims to address conflict resolution)*
7. Your adoption is very special, and your family is also special because it has two cultures mixed within it. Do your parents help to teach you about China and Chinese activities? If so, what are some examples of these activities that you do? Is this important to you? How does this make you feel about your birth country/culture? How does this make you feel about your relationship with your mom/dad? *(can ask who takes them to these things? If this is important to them?)*
8. In general, can you describe any aspects of your life that you feel has an influence on your relationship with your mom/dad? *(may reveal things such as parents working, stress, outside family conflicts, peer pressure)*

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything you wish to add to our discussion?
2. Is there anything about your relationship with your mom/dad that we did not discuss and you would like to talk about?

Appendix F

*Informed Consent Form***Date:**

Project Title: Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, Associate Professor, Department of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, Ontario, CAN.

Principal Student Investigator: Mallory Dilks, Graduate Student, Department of Child & Youth Studies, Brock University, md05oq@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to explore Canadian families who have adopted a child from China and examine associations among pre-adoptive and post-adoptive experiences and the quality of parent-child relations, from the perspectives of both parents and their adopted children.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

Both parent and child participants will be asked to participate in a separate interview. The total time anticipated for both of these interviews is approximately 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

This research will benefit you because the findings from this study may provide further information to both current and future adoptive parents and adoption agencies regarding the importance of understanding the link between the adoption process and the quality of parent-child relationships. There is a small risk that you and/or your child might feel uncomfortable discussing the adoption process and the quality of your parent-child relationship. However, this is unlikely to be the case because the questions are very general and ask only about things that you and your child might encounter in your day-to-day life. If you do feel uncomfortable you can choose to move on to another question. Both you and your child do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All of the interview responses provided by both you and your child will be kept confidential. Your names will not appear in any written report or oral presentation resulting from this research study. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's locked office at Brock University. Data will be kept until the completion of this research study on June 1, 2011, at which time it will be confidentially destroyed (e.g., deleted/shredded). Access to this data will be restricted to the principal student investigator and the principal investigator.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Both your child and you can decline to answer any questions or decline to participate in any component of this research study. Further, should you and/or your child decide to withdraw from this research study, you may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. For example, your family will receive the \$30 honorarium (gift certificate) even if you and/or your child decide to withdraw your participation from this research study. In the event that either your child or you decide to withdraw from this research study, all of your data (audio-recordings, electronic, and hard copy) will be immediately and confidentially destroyed (e.g., deleted/shredded).

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this research study will be published in a thesis, and made available to the participating adoption agency. Should you like to receive feedback about this research study, please provide your email address and a feedback letter that will be emailed to you upon completion of this research study. This will be sent to you by July, 2011.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this research study or require further information, please contact the principal student investigator using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #10-057). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the research study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. I am also aware of the researcher's legal and ethical responsibility to report any suspected child abuse/neglect to the appropriate authorities.

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I give permission for my child to participate in this study, and I agree to have his or her interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis, publication, or presentation that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I would like to receive emailed feedback about the results of this study.

☐ YES email address: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix G

Verbal Script and Assent Form for Minors

The following script is to be read to the child participant prior to the beginning of the study.

Your parents have given me permission to speak to you about a research study that I am conducting at Brock University with a researcher named Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams. This research study is about families who have adopted a child from China. I would like to tell you more about what I am doing and then I will ask you if you are interested in helping me with my research.

My name is Mallory and I am a student at Brock University. I want to tell you about research that I am doing that includes children just like you. I want to find out more about children who have been adopted from China and how parents interact with their children. I also want to know about how you feel about your relationship with your mom and dad.

If you decide to take part in my research study, I will ask you some questions about your adoption, and the kinds of things you do with your parents. For example, one question that I would ask you is, "Can you describe some examples of activities you and your mom/dad do together?" It will take you about 45 to 60 minutes to complete this interview. Your responses to my interview questions will be audio-recorded so that I can listen to them later because I might miss some important things during our interview.

One good thing about my study is that it allows me to learn more about the experiences of children who have been adopted from China. This will help families who plan to adopt from China in the future. As far as I know, there is nothing about this research study that will hurt you or make you feel bad in any way – although you might feel a bit uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about how you get along or do not get along with your parents. If this happens then you can just tell me and we will move on to another question.

If I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed then you may tell me that you do not want to answer those questions. For the questions that you do answer, anything that you say will be private and no one else will know the information that you tell me. Even your parents will not read or find out about the answers you have given me. However, if you tell me that your parents hurt you in any way then I would have to share this kind of information with other people. When this research study is done, then all of your data will be destroyed and no one will ever see your specific answers except for me and the principal investigator of this study – my colleague at Brock University.

You do not have to be in this research study. Your participation in this research study should be completely voluntary. No one will be upset with you if you choose not to be in this research study. You can ask me questions now, or at any time during the research study.

Would you like to be a part of this research study?

Child's name, printed:

_____ Date: _____

Signature of the Principal Student Investigator:

_____ Date: _____

Appendix H

Date

Dear Parent and Family,

I would like to thank you for participating in my research study entitled "Exploring the Family Context Among Children Adopted From China: Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Factors, Post-Adoption Experiences, and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships." As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to explore Canadian families who have adopted a child from China and to examine the pre-adoptive and post-adoptive experiences that are associated with the quality of parent-child relationships.

Your participation in this study will help to clarify our understanding of the relation between the adoption process and the quality of parent-child relationships. The findings from this research study will benefit you as parents, your child, and future adoptive parents because they will provide further information regarding the quality of parent-child relations within internationally adoptive families and the factors that are associated with these relationships.

Should you be interested in examining resources related to parenting and international adoption below are some online resources.

- "An Online Adoption Education Community" - <http://adoptionlearningpartners.org/>
- "General Information for "Canada's Parenting Community" - <http://www.canadianparents.com/>
- "Families with Children From China" - <http://fwcc.org/>

Should you wish to further discuss parenting practices or international adoption, please contact your adoption agency. Also, listed below is the website for Toronto Family Services, which includes several links and other information that may be valuable to you.

- "Family Service Toronto" - <http://www.fsatoronto.com/>

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #10-057). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me using the contact information provided below.

Thank you again for your time,

Mallory Dilks
Graduate Student
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
md05oq@brocku.ca

Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams
Associate Professor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
905-688-5550 ext. 4557
ctardifwilliams@brocku.ca

Appendix I

Date

Dear Child,

I would like to thank you for helping me with my research study. With your help, I was able to learn more about the process of international adoption and how parents and their children interact with each other. It is with your help that we may now be able to help other families like yours who have adopted or are planning to adopt a child from China in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this research study, please talk to your parents or another trusted adult. You may also feel free to contact me using the contact information provided below.

Thank you again for your time!

Mallory Dilks
Graduate Student
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
md05oq@brocku.ca

Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams
Associate Professor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
905-688-5550 ext. 4557

